

**AN ELUSIVE IDENTITY:
Versions of South America in English Literature
from Aphra Behn to the Present Day**

by

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Abstract

Rather than being an account of 'South Americanism' to echo Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), this study of books about South America in English literature attempts to make the critical and methodological distinctions which would be essential to such an account. Its examination of the geography of the 'South America' of the European imagination therefore begins by using Roland Barthes' model - from *Mythologies* (1957) - of *sinité* as the clichéd popular stereotype of China, *la Chine*, in order to differentiate the physical reality of the Southern American continent from the literary worlds which have been promulgated under that title.

The textual strategies adopted to sustain (or subvert) these 'mythological' assumptions in a number of representative works - ranging in era from Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) to Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), and in genre from Darwin's *Journal of Researches* (1839) to Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) - are then detailed. Authors are examined individually, in terms of their cultural and generic context, but each book has also been chosen to contribute to an overall picture of methods of presenting the 'alien' in Western writing. To this end, authors such as W. H. Hudson, John Masefield, R. B. Cunninghame Graham and Elizabeth Bishop are contrasted with analogous Latin American writers - D. F. Sarmiento, Alejo Carpentier, Mario Vargas Llosa and Euclides da Cunha.

In the final analysis, this is a study of the various ways in which the words 'South America' can act as the ideological or meaning-giving centre of a text. It is therefore not surprising that only the letter of the works under discussion - their own conception of this relationship - is found to be adequate to the complexity of the mimetic problems raised as a result.

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Statement

I hereby certify that this thesis was composed by myself, and is entirely my own work.

Note

A Companion Volume to the thesis, in three parts - a 'Chronology of Europe in South America', a 'Chronology of Latin American literature', and a series of bibliographies and discussions of 'South America in Popular Culture' - exists, and may be consulted on application to the author.

General Preface

I

In *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, his recent 'interpretive history of the Latin American novel in the twentieth century'¹, Gerald Martin remarks, almost as an aside:

One Hundred Years of Solitude, the first Latin American novel ever to achieve international bestseller status apparently on its own terms, raises the question of what those foreign - especially Anglo-American - readers saw in the book, and whether there is not some need for a book on 'South Americanism' to match Edward Said's book on Orientalism. America has acted as Utopia or as Exotic Other ever since it was discovered, and as a combination of natural paradise and political fantasy since the nineteenth century².

This thesis, I hasten to add, is not intended to be that book - but it does, perhaps, represent some of the groundwork which would be necessary for such a study. Certainly it attempts to examine many of the questions raised by Martin here and at other points in his rather labyrinthine argument.

Why, for example, are Anglo-American readers 'especially' attracted by what he calls elsewhere - 'the tropical "Greenland" of heat, vultures and hopelessness'³? Is it, as he claims, simply because the 'stereotyped Latin America' associated with such a 'caricatured "magical realist" style',

allows such readers both to enjoy the voluptuous delights of barbaric Otherness whilst satisfying the inherent sense of cultural superiority and ethnocentric attitudes that go with an ex-colonial mentality.⁴?

Quoted in isolation, this rather programmatic answer may seem to verge on self-parody, but to take it thus would not do justice to the difficulties of Martin's

¹Gerald Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, Critical Studies in Latin American Culture (London, 1989), p.xi.

²Martin, pp.224-25.

³Martin, p.292.

⁴Martin, p.313.

position. His task is, after all, precisely not to become entangled in questions of the image of Latin America in European tradition - 'Latin Americans need to discover their identities before they decide to discard them'⁵. In terms of the alternate study which he himself envisages, though, such an answer raises as many questions as it solves. Why do the 'voluptuous delights of barbaric Otherness' as laid out in (mis)readings of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* appeal more to Anglo-Americans than, for example, the French? Neither the English nor the French ever had a colonial presence in Latin America to compare with that established by them in Africa or the Middle East - also fruitful sources of 'barbaric Otherness' in literature. Is it, then, to be ascribed to a difference in temperament between the two nations - the fact that, as Martin puts it, 'what the British persist in calling "South" America was actually "Latin"'⁶, and therefore more 'Exotic' and 'Other' to Anglo-Saxons than to their fellow Latins, the French and Spanish?

These are large questions, and somewhat beyond the scope of a literary inquiry such as this; but they do at least indicate the possible ramifications that such an interrogation of some of the classic *gringo* texts about South America entails. ('South' rather than 'Latin' - *pace* Martin - because the geographical division of Panama understandably appeals more to outside commentators, whose acquaintance with the region may be confined to books and maps, than the somewhat intangible cultural divide between Ibero and Anglo-America). They also explain why this study is being conducted under the *aegis* of a Department of English, rather than Hispanic Studies or even Comparative Literature. A number of Latin American works are cited and discussed in the text, but it is in terms of their influence on Western writers and theorists, rather than in their own right as contributions to their indigenous culture(s)⁷. What interests me, for the purposes of this study, is therefore the distortion rather than the truth, the inappropriate

⁵Martin, p.366.

⁶Martin, p.142.

⁷Since this is a line which is easier to draw in theory than in practice, I make a point of citing any texts which are particularly concentrated upon both in the original and in translation (that is, with the exception of works in Portuguese, owing to my ignorance of that language).

rather than the appropriate contextualization, the misreading rather than the 'correct' interpretation. It is easy enough (and undoubtedly necessary) to see Western images of Latin America as the rubble of an exploded 'colonial mentality', but it seems to me perhaps more fruitful to attempt to introduce some finer distinctions into our picture of the assimilation of an alien environment into our own literary culture. Martin's emphasis on the 'nineteenth century' may also be seen, in these terms, to be more the result of his own expectations of Imperialist backlash than the actual intellectual genealogy of such iconographic representations.

To make my own position in relation to these 'post-colonial' questions somewhat clearer, it might be best for me to abandon the rather generalized tone of these opening remarks and lapse into autobiography. The history of my work on this topic is that of a series of false starts - false starts each with something significant about it - and it may therefore be useful to say a little about these dead ends in order to explain the course I have finally taken.

I began with the discovery, while reading John Masefield's novels *Sard Harker* (1924) and *Odtaa* (1926), that there was something identifiably 'South American' not only about their setting, the imaginary Caribbean republic of Santa Barbara, but also about the kinds of action described - revolutions, bandits speaking a strange argot, canyons filled with blood. It was a landscape made familiar by American Westerns and the 'magic realism' of García Márquez and his colleagues as much as by boys' Romances about Cortés, Drake, and the Spanish Main. If that had been all, one might have been tempted to write it off as a clichéd European view of New World peoples and landscapes, but there was something in it that was more cerebral, as well. For Masefield, it seemed to be operating as a kind of country of the mind - a metaphysical stage where certain realities of life could be highlighted without the distraction of quotidian detail.

My conclusion was that a distinction could legitimately be made between these two things: the geographical South America, a part of Latin America with its own characteristic landscapes and peoples; and the literary 'South America', constructed in European writing and thought over the last five hundred years - overlapping, but not at all identical with the former. I therefore began, in a paper

entitled 'John Masefield's South America'⁸, by looking for themes or factors in Masefield's treatment of South America which could be paralleled in the works of other imaginative writers - among them Conrad, Aphra Behn, W. H. Hudson, as well as Latin Americans such as García Márquez, Pablo Neruda and Octavio Paz. And (in retrospect, inevitably) I found them. I found, for example, an interesting continuity in these writers' treatment of women as idealized figures of South America - Hudson's Rima, the spirit of the forests⁹, can be matched against Conrad's 'beautiful Antonia'¹⁰, for whose sake the geographical division of the 'Occidental Province' Sulaco from Costaguana is accomplished by her lover Decoud; or, for that matter, with Neruda's picture of the continent as a woman:

Amada de los ríos, combatida
por agua azul y gotas transparentes,
como un árbol de venas es tu espectro
de diosa oscura que muerde manzanas¹¹.

There was nothing in all this, however, or in the other threads of 'quest imagery' and 'the imaginary country' (which I also discussed), which gave me a clue to the essential 'South American-ness' of Masefield's inspiration - beyond the fact that all of the writers treated had reimagined South America in their own image. The identification of women with countries, and of their bodies with physical details of topography was obviously a generic theme of Romance¹², and could not *per se* characterize the spirit of a particular place. The problem I was

⁸Delivered as a Departmental Seminar to the English Department of Auckland University on June 19, 1986.

⁹W. H. Hudson, Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest (London, 1954).

¹⁰Joseph Conrad, Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard, edited by Martin Seymour-Smith (Harmondsworth, 1986), p.33.

¹¹Pablo Neruda, Canto general (Barcelona, 1983), p.16: 'Beloved of the rivers, beset/ by azure water and transparent drops./ like a tree of veins your spectre/ of dark goddess biting apples' (translations quoted from Pablo Neruda, Selected Poems, edited by Nathaniel Tarn (London, 1970) - page numbers thus (173)).

¹²Note the omnipresent 'apples' even in Neruda's allegedly indigenous imagery. Martin quotes a remark by Julio Cortázar to the effect that 'the female as "Eve" (woman of flesh and blood rather than ideal projection) arrived late in Latin American literature ... her first appearance was ... in Pablo Neruda's Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (1924)'. (Martin, p.370).

attempting to solve could be expressed in terms of the question: Could the atmosphere of South America in literature be distinguished from that of other alien environments such as Africa, South-East Asia or the Pacific? And, in terms of the critical methodology which I was employing, the answer appeared to be 'no'.

My next task became, therefore, the search for a theoretical model which would allow me to put such a question more effectively. I found this in Roland Barthes' book *Mythologies* (1957) and (specifically) in a distinction made by subsequent critics, including Paul de Man¹³, between 'mythological' (i.e. naive) and 'fictional' (sophisticated and subversive) employments of the same set of motifs. My way forward now became clear - first, to isolate some representative 'myths' of South America (to match the clichéd views of China described by Barthes¹⁴), and then to give an account of their systematic elaboration in various works of 'fiction' (in the above, specialized sense).

The mythological paradigm is, however, essentially a truism. It is useful as a way of characterizing common perceptions of a place, and such notions can undoubtedly be seen to function in any artistic portrayal of that place, but it turns simply into another catalogue of defining elements if used as one's sole method of analysis for those works themselves. The problem can be illustrated by the fact that mythologies, as presumed constants, cannot be used to differentiate between Latin American and European portrayals of the same continent - or, indeed, to discover if such a distinction is in fact justified. Also, the elements of imagined versions of South America - godlike/ beastlike natives; welcoming/ forbidding mountains, rivers and plains; forests of 'incense-bearing trees'¹⁵ - would inevitably be found to recur in descriptions of any of the other 'alien' regions listed above.

¹³'Criticism and Crisis', in Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, second edition (London, 1983), pp.3-19 (p.18): 'But the fiction is not myth, for it knows and names itself as fiction. It is not a demystification, it is demystified from the start.'

¹⁴Roland Barthes, 'Le mythe, aujourd'hui', in *Mythologies* (Paris, 1982), pp.191-247.

¹⁵A conceit to be found in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, edited by Montague Summers, 6 vols (London and Stratford-on-Avon, 1915), V, pp.125-208), as well as in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.

Since the particularity of my project depended on making just such a distinction, I felt that the essence of a literary 'South America' must lie somewhere else.

My third start, then, consisted of an examination of the different approaches of a series of individual authors to 'South America' as the ideological centre of the works, fictional or non-fictional, for which they chose that setting (bearing in mind the inevitable ambiguity of such a term). In order to cover as many aspects as possible, I identified each of them with a particular generic approach to the problem of re-imagining or re-creating a place - historiography, travel-writing, the novel, the Romance, even the act of translation itself. This had the advantage of finally getting away from the idea of 'South America' as an amalgam of particular sets of things: curare, condors, castanets - the Amazon, the Pampa, the Andes - Indians, gauchos, and rubber-barons. It also provided a vehicle for talking about the various contingent ways in which the words 'South America' can establish a meaning for themselves.

Its disadvantage as a model, however - besides its diffuse character - was the essentially static readings it provided. I attempted to examine different treatments from a number of different angles; but without an ideological thread to connect them, this promoted a confused and finally unhelpful approach to the problem of the true nature of literary 'South American-ness' with which we started - Masfield becoming just another example, instead of the key.

So, to summarize, of the three approaches tried by me,

1. The first looked at some of the common features of Romance to be found in treatments of South America.
The advantage of this was that these features were undoubtedly there to be found; but the disadvantage was the lack of any specific connection to South America as a quality.
2. The second employed Barthes' 'mythological' model.
The advantage of this was its success in classifying some important structural features of the popular view of South America; but the disadvantage was that a mere list of features was not much help in analyzing the specific strategies of 'fictionalizers'.
3. The third took a series of authors and studied their individual approaches to the problem of making a 'South America' in their own image.
The advantage of this was that it finally dispensed with the list of things allegedly characteristic of South America; but the disadvantage was that it was static and unprogressive by nature, which promoted confusion.

At this point it became essential to ask whether the problem lay on a level deeper than that of methodology. Martin, Barthes, and Said do, after all, share a strong sense of the political purpose of their theoretical paradigms - indeed, it might well be that a quest such as my own for the significance of the Latin American equivalent of *chinoiserie* is in itself an ideologically insensitive one, given the current social and economic turmoil in the region (undoubtedly to some extent the result of such pre-digested notions of a backward and picturesque South America). It might be seen as helping to perpetuate misunderstandings, rather than clearing them up.

Let us then examine the question a little differently, by looking at some other approaches to the same or similar problems of definition (which must, after all, bulk large in the thinking of anyone concerned with the general field of cultural relations between Europe and the developing world - whether during the era of colonialism, or in the present day).

II

Orientalism

one must repeatedly ask oneself whether what matters in Orientalism is the general group of ideas overriding the mass of material - about which who could deny that they were shot through with doctrines of European superiority, various kinds of racism, imperialism, and the like, dogmatic views of 'the Oriental' as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction? - or the much more varied work produced by almost uncountable individual writers, whom one would take up as individual instances of authors dealing with the Orient.¹⁶

This statement from Edward Said's influential book on the Western concept of 'Orientalism' as a branch of study puts the methodological difficulties which stand in the way of such an inquiry with impressive candour. As he acknowledges, and as few of those who have followed in his footsteps since *Orientalism* appeared in 1978 have cared to admit, the choice which must always be made is whether it is the overriding assumptions and cultural codes of each text which are to be teased out, or whether each individual author's 'orientation' with regard to this set of attitudes should be examined separately. Nor is the question purely a matter of emphasis. As Said comments towards the end of his book:

Islam *has* been fundamentally misrepresented in the West - [but] the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer.¹⁷

It is a familiar device of rhetoric to imagine the two opposing sides of an argument as representing two absolute poles of meaning. Said, here, counters criticism of his own interpretations of interpreters (just as historically contingent as their own, presumably), by seeing such critiques as amounting to ideological relativism. Since no debate is possible without some fixed points of reference, he therefore sets up an oblique justification for his own political 'decoding' of three centuries of Western thought. He quotes with approval R. W. Southern's

¹⁶Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p.8.

¹⁷Said, p.272.

'demonstration that it is finally Western ignorance which becomes more refined and complex, not some body of positive Western knowledge which increases in size and accuracy'¹⁸, but fails to explain how such a seemingly immutable process can be corrected by simply documenting such distortions. 'Ignorance' surely only exists in contradistinction to 'knowledge' - and unless one has some stable ground on which to found one's claim to possess the latter, argument becomes simply an exchange of words based on the personal interests of those involved.

Islam has been fundamentally misrepresented in the West, as he says, but the question that remains is whether the kind of ideological overview which he has so brilliantly achieved in *Orientalism* is the best intellectual counter to this misrepresentation. In one sense, of course, it is - as everyone now has a list at their fingertips of 'Eurocentric' distortions of the Other; but it is surely naive to imagine that this represents a new way of thinking, emancipated from the past. 'Orientals', Indians, South Americans, can be as securely patronized from within a context of post-colonial guilt as they ever were by Imperialists. As Said puts it:

It is perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated strangeness; therefore cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be.¹⁹

The important thing, therefore, is to be self-conscious about the ways in which these mechanisms operate in oneself - and, by extension, in the culture of which one forms a part.

Said's position is a carefully thought-out one, and he does not lightly set aside such issues. Some more recent books, however, show the dangers of simply aping his conclusions without studying the method of his text. Rana Kabbani's *Europe's Myths of Orient* (1986), for example, reduces the history of Western relations with the East to a kind of comic-strip, awaiting the services of a textual critic before such a tissue of falsehoods can be evaporated. A classic example of her methods can be found in the following statement about 'seraglios':

¹⁸Said, p.62.

¹⁹Said, p.67.

These descriptions [of seraglios] were a self-perpetuating *topos*, repeated and copied again and again since they corresponded exactly to Western expectations.²⁰

So, in other words, Westerners knew what they expected of seraglios, and repeated descriptions of them because they satisfied such expectations. But how could the first descriptions have been composed according to these 'expectations', since the West needed to read the descriptions before they could 'repeat and copy' them because of their fidelity to the aforementioned pre-conceived views? It is an argument in a circle, but it is more than that. The reason why Kabbani's statement comes to grief is because she never makes any attempt to distinguish between the reality of the East and the iconography built up around it by the West. She assumes that any Western description must consist entirely of the latter, and therefore spares herself the trouble of finding out anything first-hand about, say, seraglios. In this she imagines herself to be following Said, who says that the evidence for such 'representations' of the Orient, 'is found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treatises) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e., openly imaginative) text':

The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.²¹

Kabbani takes this to mean that one need only look for 'style, figures of speech, setting ...' etc. in any text chosen for study, and that the 'correctness of the representation' is irrelevant. In fact, of course, what Said is saying is not that 'seraglios' (for example) exist solely as a 'self-perpetuating topos' - but that the way in which they are described is a fruitful source of information on larger attitudes towards the East. For Kabbani, it is enough that they are described at all; for Said, the actual terms of each description are significant.

The source of dispute can be found stated again in Patrick Brantlinger's book *Rule of Darkness* (1988) - about Imperialism in nineteenth century British writing. He specifies at the outset:

²⁰Rana Kabbani, Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule (London, 1986), p.18.

²¹Said, p.21.

Among some critics there is an evident desire to downplay politics altogether; my own view is closer to Fredric Jameson's. He contends [in *The Political Unconscious* (1981)] that 'the political perspective' is ... more than a mere 'supplementary method ... auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today'; such a perspective is rather 'the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.'²²

and continues:

This is true not because class consciousness or economic forces 'determine' in some absolute, one-dimensional manner the ideas and values expressed in literature but simply because literature is inevitably social: it is written in society, by social beings, addressed to other social beings²³.

The 'argument from absolutes' identified earlier with regard to Said is seen here in its most virulent form. 'Politics' is identified (as usual) with a particular view of politics - 'class-consciousness [and] economic forces' - but, lest the evident absurdity of anyone claiming to be able to disentangle such forces from such a limited set of data be recognized, he goes on to identify this fact with the other 'fact' that 'literature is inevitably social: it is written in society ...'. A truism is thus used to reinforce a polemical view by making alternative points-of-view seem to deny the validity of the truism. Criticism is, indeed, always 'political' - and writing is written in society - but it does not follow that the criticism that best acknowledges this is that whose methodology most insists on charting 'class consciousness and economic forces' (i.e. the symbolic terminology of Marxism).

Returning to the central question under discussion, the proper methodology for treating Western views of South America - and its two concomitant branches: how to distinguish such views from other generalized views of the 'alien'; and whether the 'South America' of imaginative authors like Masfield should in fact be equated with the South America of geography - it is clear that many of these questions have already been faced by Said. He himself acknowledges, however, in

²²Patrick Brantlinger, Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914 (Ithaca and London, 1988), p.10.

²³Brantlinger, p.10.

the quotation at the head of this section, that an ideologized 'political' perspective cannot be adopted without the loss of a power to discriminate between specific individuals' employment of 'South Americanism' (to reiterate Martin's original term). Studies like Kabbani's show the danger of such an abdication, while the difficulties of a political absolutism are pointed up by the contradictions inherent in Brantlinger's position (despite the cogency of many of his readings).

In short, then, despite my basic agreement with many of Said's points (the 'evidence' to be gleaned from the 'so-called truthful' text; his twin methods of '*strategic location*' and '*strategic formation*'²⁴; and the distinctions he makes between the West and other cultures, 'To the Westerner ... the Oriental was always *like* some aspect of the West'²⁵), I feel that his method has many of the defects of my 'Romance' classification of South America. It depends on a preconceived intellectual model for its ordering (in the one case, genre theory, in the other, post-colonial politics), and is unspecific in its approach to the nature of the places described. In Said's case, given the fact that his subject is the extension of the 'Orient' to cover a myriad of diverse cultures and experiences, this is quite pardonable - indeed, practically inevitable. A similar analysis of 'South Americanism', however, could not be as specific to its equivalent of 'Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient'²⁶.

The Invention of America

The answer to our problem now becomes clear: the fault that lies at the root of the entire history of the idea of the discovery of America consists in assuming that the lump of cosmic matter which we now know as the American continent has always been that, when actually it only became that when such a meaning was given to it, and will cease to be that when, by virtue of some change in the current world concept, that meaning will no longer

²⁴Said, p.20: 'strategic location, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about, and strategic formation, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and ... in the culture at large.'

²⁵Said, p.67.

²⁶V. G. Kiernan's phrase, quoted in Said, p.52.

be assigned to it.²⁷

Having examined one possible approach to the problem of characterizing the European literary construct 'South America', it is now necessary to look at another important branch of theory associated with the subject. By and large, there are two major lines of approach to this question of the 'invention of America' which have to be distinguished. On the one hand, we have a series of Latin American perspectives - beginning with the book by Edmundo O'Gorman cited above and continued by Gabriel García Márquez²⁸, Carlos Fuentes²⁹, and Mario Vargas Llosa³⁰. The endeavour here is essentially to distinguish the reality of contemporary Latin America from the fiction of America created by Columbus and other theorists of his 'discovery'. As Vargas Llosa puts it:

In the eighteenth century, in France, the name of Peru rang with a golden echo, and an expression was then born - *ce n'est pas le Pérou* - which is used when something is not as rich and extraordinary as its legendary name suggests. Well, *'Le Pérou, ce n'est pas le Pérou'*. It never was, at least for the great part of its inhabitants, that fabulous country of legends and fictions³¹.

The other approach is what might be called the 'Anglo-American' one - beginning, again, with O'Gorman's lectures at the University of Indiana, and

²⁷Edmundo O'Gorman, The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History (Bloomington, 1961), p.42.

²⁸Gabriel García Márquez, El olor de la guayaba: Conversaciones con Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza (Barcelona, 1982); translated by Ann Wright as The Fragrance of Guava: Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza in Conversation with Gabriel García Márquez (London, 1983).

²⁹Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America, E. Allison Peers Lectures, 2 (Liverpool, 1987); also in Myself with Others: Selected Essays (London, 1989), pp.180-95.

³⁰Mario Vargas Llosa, 'Latin America: Fiction and Reality', in Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey, edited by John King (London, 1987), pp.1-17; also (in abridged form, as 'Latin American Fiction and Reality') in TLS, 30 January 1987, 110-11.

³¹King, p.15.

continued in a series of diverse studies by R. W. B. Lewis³², Hugh Honour³³, and Peter Conrad³⁴. To this short list one could undoubtedly add a myriad of other names - D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), Stefan Zweig, *Brazil, Land of the Future* (1942), Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), P. Rayner Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta* (1982), Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* (1986); even films like Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* (1984), or Percy Adlon's *Bagdad Café* (1988) - but the few that I have mentioned can be taken to represent a certain scholarly consensus.

O'Gorman's argument (it seems best to begin with him) hinges on an essentialist notion of the nature of 'contemporary thought'. He claims that Columbus is enshrined as the 'discoverer' of America rather than its 'inventor' because of a philosophical fallacy - the idea 'that the lump of cosmic matter which we now know as the American continent has always been that'. Columbus could not have discovered it, as he had not yet conceptualized it. He concludes his ingenious demonstration by stating that it is this very process of invention which constitutes America's importance in world history:

It was the Spanish part of the invention of America that liberated Western man from the fetters of a prison-like conception of his physical world, and it was the English part that liberated him from subordination to a Europe-centered conception of his historical world.³⁵

This rather naive view of the beneficent nature of first Spanish and then

³²R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London, 1955) - a study of the 'Adamic ideal' of the 'authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history.' (p.1).

³³Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York, 1975) - an English art historian's view of how Europeans have tended 'to see in America an idealized or distorted image of their own countries, onto which they could project their own aspirations and fears'. (p.3).

³⁴Peter Conrad, *Imagining America* (New York, 1980) - an Australian cultural critic's account of a set of English literary visitors' 're-inventions' of America.

³⁵O'Gorman, p.145.

American expansionism - fruit of an absolutist and idealist conception of historical progress - is corrected by Carlos Fuentes, in his own parallel summation of the mythological status of America in European thought:

This is America. It is a continent. It is big. It is a place discovered to make the world larger. In it live noble savages. Their time is the Golden Age. America was invented for people to be happy in. You cannot be unhappy in America. It is a sin to have tragedy in America. There is no need for unhappiness in America. America does not need to conquer anything. It is too vast. America is its own frontier. America is its own utopia.

And America is a name.³⁶

Within its own context - a study of the 'mythical history' of America as recorded and parodied in García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967) - Fuentes' logic is unassailable. Latin Americans must combat European 'fictions' of their identity in order to survive; and literature, rather than historiography, is the most appropriate arena in which to do so.

Our Anglo-American theorists, however, have a much less urgent brief - hence their easy acceptance of the term 'America' as denoting simultaneously the United States and the two continents of North and South America. It is not that the books which I have mentioned do not contain a good deal of valuable analysis of the ways in which America has acted as a distorting mirror - part Utopia, part Dystopia - for the European mind; it is just that their authors do not appear to think it necessary to distinguish effectively between this imaginary America and the reality of its inhabitants' lives. Conrad, Honour, and (to a lesser extent) Lewis talk happily of the fact that 'When a European sets out on his first journey to America he knows, or thinks he knows, not only where he is going but what he will find when he arrives. So did Columbus'³⁷. But if these imaginations are always fallacious, would it not be better to speak of a self-perpetuating 'New World' myth than of a series of travelogues centred around a single fixed

³⁶Fuentes, *Invention of America*, p.3.

³⁷Honour, *The New Golden Land*, p.3. Compare Peter Conrad: 'Before America could be discovered, it had to be imagined. Columbus knew what he hoped to find before he left Europe.' (p.3).

America?

My own position as a New Zealander, writing as a commentator on European views of South America, forbids me to adopt either the 'engaged' perspective of a native Latin American or the cultural security of this dominant Anglo-American tradition. I observe with interest, therefore, these two intellectual genealogies of the idea of 'America' (with a tinge more respect for the Latin American view), but neither offers me a methodology which can be honestly sustained by so marginalized a critic.

But am I simply protesting too much? Is there really a problem here on the scale I have implied? To answer these questions, let us look at some studies which have attempted something more along the lines of my own inquiry.

(Partial) Precedents

This is ultimately how the Mexican setting functions in these novels, as an infernal paradise, a dualistic image which conflates all of the horrors and hopes that constitute the spiritual lives of the four protagonists.³⁸

The 'four protagonists' in question are the heroes of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940), D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947), all set in Mexico, and the subject of Ronald Walker's *Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel* (1978). The similarity to my own topic is at once striking, and it will therefore be interesting to examine some of the theoretical assumptions to be found in Walker's work.

there are important images in each work that tend to localize the quest for rebirth and give it a clearer focus. My discussions of the novels trace the use of three such images - blood, border, and *barranca* - which gradually become identified with the most compelling forces at the heart of Mexican existence as seen by the English novelists.³⁹

³⁸Ronald G. Walker, *Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978), p.24.

³⁹Walker, p.25.

Essentially, then, Walker's is an inventory method of criticism - along the lines of my Romance and Mythological characterizations of South America - and with the attendant disadvantages of 1/ lack of specificity to Mexico, and 2/ the difficulty of demonstrating a more than coincidental accord in the employment of these 'images' in the works under discussion.

Walker's is, in any case, a largely documentary account. He traces (most interestingly) the movements of each author around Mexico, and looks at the travel books and notes devoted by each of them to the region before attempting a reading of their novels. The three 'images' become, as a result, more of a structuring device for traditional close readings than a theoretical statement about the nature of 'Mexico' as a European construct. Indeed, many of the claims he makes in passing would seem impossibly naive if they did not actually depend on such an established set of conventions of interpretation.

For instance:

Whether presenting impressions of the native character, landscape or politics ... or simply describing the author's travel experiences - the best travel writing is generally characterized by subjectivity, by a deliberate focus on the author's state of mind as affected by the strange surroundings.⁴⁰

Or else:

This is one of the important insights offered by the generic border experience recorded in *Another Mexico* [American title of Greene's *The Lawless Roads* (1939)]. The progressive stages - looking across, crossing, looking back, then recrossing, and finally looking back from the familiar side to the unfamiliar - disclose, in the end, the fundamental cyclicity of experience in *all* regions.⁴¹

The question is, are such statements only problematic in my terms? In what sense is Walker's a study of Mexico if the experience of border crossing (one of his three 'b's') is 'cyclic' in all regions? One can see the justice of doing a reading of a series of novels which happen to be set in Mexico, and examining how they influenced one another - even of pointing out some features of Mexico ('death',

⁴⁰Walker, p.11.

⁴¹Walker, p.197.

borders, 'blood', *barrancas*⁴²) which appear in all of them - but is this not a study of the 'Modern English Novel in Mexico' rather than 'Mexico in the Modern English Novel'? For the latter, one presumes, some discussion of the relationship between European and Latin American paradigms of 'Mexico' would be required.

A far more limited and therefore less helpful, though perhaps ultimately more successful study is Colin Steele's *English Interpreters of the Iberian New World from Purchas to Stevens: A Bibliographical Study* (1975). All that Steele feels able to conclude after an exhaustive listing of seventeenth century translations of Spanish and Portuguese books about the New World is, 'Ironically therefore it took nearly all of the period 1603 to 1726 [the bounds of his study] for a return to the intellectual standards and discipline of Richard Hakluyt'⁴³. This is honest, if unexciting, but not much help for formulating larger terms of comparison between the two cultures - something which Walker at least attempts. Eventually, though, the latter leaves Malcolm Lowry to ask the larger question: 'But what is the secret of the attraction, one might say the almost teleological psychic attraction, of Mexico?'; and himself concludes:

The answers to these questions, like so many things pertaining to Lowry's life and personality, are elusive.⁴⁴

A more fruitful attempt to codify the relations between Mexico and Europe is to be found in Octavio Paz's classic *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950). A selection of phrases from the essays included in this account of 'Vida y pensamiento de México' will show the extent to which Paz has reflected on precisely this subject.

mientras los españoles se complacen en la blasfemia y la escatología, nosotros nos especializamos en la crueldad y el

⁴²Defined by Walker as 'deep gaping ravines cutting into the mountainous terrain.' (p.26)

⁴³Colin Steele, *English Interpreters of the Iberian New World from Purchas to Stevens: A Bibliographical Study. 1603-1726* (Oxford, 1975), p.14.

⁴⁴Walker, p.282.

sadismo. El español es simple: insulta a Dios porque cree en él.⁴⁵

La novedad de las nuevas naciones hispanoamericanas es engañosa; en verdad se trata de sociedades en decadencia o en forzada inmovilidad, supervivencias y fragmentos de un todo deshecho.⁴⁶

[Leopoldo] Zea afirma que, hasta hace poco, América fue el monólogo de Europa, una de las formas históricas en que encarnó su pensamiento; hoy ese monólogo tiende a convertirse en diálogo. Un diálogo que no es puramente intelectual sino social, político y vital.⁴⁷

Paz sees the relationship between Spain and Mexico as a dynamic one - based at first, of course, on the latter's being a fragment 'de un todo deshecho', but in the process of becoming a dialogue between mutually dependent cultural systems. The contrast between 'blasphemy' on the one hand and 'sadism' on the other may denote, as he suggests, the residues of eschatological belief on the European side - but it also shows the extent to which Spanish America provides a malign echo of Spanish baroque in the colonial period, Enlightenment thought after the Liberation, and now multi-national capitalism. As he puts it elsewhere - Liberalism 'Afirma al hombre pero ignora una mitad del hombre: ésa que se expresa en los mitos, la comunión, el festín, el sueño, el erotismo'⁴⁸. In other words, it is precisely the Utopian tradition of European thought about Latin America which has denied it its right to be human. Being seen successively as Earthly Paradise, Federation of free Democracies, and haven for the Western debt

⁴⁵Octavio Paz, 'Los hijos de la Malinche', in El laberinto de la soledad, Colección Popular (Mexico, 1988), pp.59-80 (p.70): 'while the Spaniards enjoy using blasphemy and scatology, we specialize in cruelty and sadism. The Spaniard is simple: he insults God because he believes in Him.' (translations quoted from Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico, translated by Lysander Kemp (Harmondsworth, 1985) - page numbers thus (69)).

⁴⁶'De la Independencia a la Revolución', in Paz, pp.106-34 (p.110): 'The newness of the new Spanish-American nations is deceptive: in reality they were decadent or static societies, fragments and survivals of a shattered whole.' (113).

⁴⁷'La "inteligencia" mexicana', in Paz, pp.135-55 (p.152): 'Zea declares that until recently America was Europe's monologue, one of the historical forms in which its thought was embodied. Lately, however, this monologue has become a dialogue, one that is not purely intellectual but is also social and political.' (159).

⁴⁸Paz, p.115: 'championed man but ignored a half of his nature, that which is expressed in communion, myths, festivals, dreams, eroticism.' (119).

mountain makes a hard legacy to disown.

A creditable, but far more limited attempt to allow the continent its own voice on such questions of identity is to be found in Harriet de Onís' anthology *The Golden Land* (1948), which she describes as 'a theory illustrated by an anthology'⁴⁹. In the following summary of the 'theory', one detects the unspoken assumptions of Western liberal thought, but also an honest attempt at allowing the other partner in the dialogue at least equal space:

For a long time, in the course of my readings in the field of Latin American literature, I had been struck by the way certain themes, certain attitudes, kept repeating themselves throughout the different phases of its development. Particularly impressive is the Antaeus quality about Latin American writers: their strength is proportionate to their union with their own earth. Keyserling has spoken of the telluric force of South America, how man is dominated by the earth, the landscape, to the point of becoming an integral part of it. Tradition plays an equally powerful role.⁵⁰

It is perhaps partly the date of de Onís' work - during the period (roughly from the 1920s to the 1950s) of the 'regional' or 'telluric' novelists - which misleads her, but the terms of her statement say quite a lot. The authority of Europe (Count Keyserling) and of classical tradition (Antaeus) are employed to define the 'South American' - note how the term changes from 'Latin American' further up, when speaking of their literature - as someone 'dominated by the ... landscape' and by 'tradition'. From my point of view, however, the most disappointing thing is her proposal to illustrate how 'certain themes, certain attitudes' keep repeating themselves in this writing. We have returned to the concept of the inventory - or, in other words, to the pitfalls of my 'Romance' classification of South America.

Numerous other works remain to be examined, but I imagine I have said

⁴⁹The Golden Land: An Anthology of Latin American Folklore in Literature, selected, edited, and translated by Harriet de Onís (New York, 1948), p.vii. De Onís' work may be taken as broadly representative of other European summaries of Latin American approaches to the question of their own identity. Of these, Gordon Brotherston's Image of the New World: The American Continent Portrayed in Native Texts (London, 1979), should be mentioned, along with the recent 8-part BBC television series Made in Latin America (U.K., 1989).

⁵⁰de Onís, p.vii.

enough to illustrate the difficulties of devising a critical methodology to deal with the question of South American identity without being in either the clear position of a native Latin American or a critic tacitly assenting to the ethnocentric dogmas of traditional Western scholarship. As Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia put it in the preface to their recent collection of essays, *Reinventing the Americas* (1986):

Conceived in the Old World, the New World may be said to have been written in advance, and then rewritten in the chronicles of discovery, conquest, and settlement.⁵¹

Despite their attention to modern gender studies and the politicized context of 'post-Said' criticism their work achieves little theoretical advance in this respect on its Anglo-American predecessors.

⁵¹Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America, edited by Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia (Cambridge, 1986), p.vii.

III

The most obvious response to the previous section's rather polemical attempt to show the theoretical gap remaining in the field of 'South American' studies would be to challenge the present author to do better. One reply to such an ultimatum would be to acknowledge that many of the books which I have discussed - Ronald Walker's, Harriet de Onís's, Colin Steele's - are not even attempting to deal with these particular critical issues. Nevertheless, pointing out this failure even to see an issue to be addressed seems to me as important as trying to provide a panacea singlehanded.

I would therefore summarize the lessons learnt from this process as follows:

1. In the absence of a contingent cultural position, such as that of a native Latin American (or a Palestinian, in the semi-parallel case of Said's strictures on 'Orientalism'), it is important to avoid simply echoing the cultural certainties of a dominant critical ideology.
2. The obvious alternative to this would appear to be the political dogmatism of a Brantlinger or Kabbani, but the danger here is forfeiting the ability to make intelligent distinctions between the achievement of individual texts.

My conclusion, almost inevitably, is a compromise among the various alternatives presented. From Said, I have adopted something resembling his system of 'strategic location' (the general 'laws' of representation of South America, as codified in Barthes' mythological model), and 'strategic formation' (the relationship between a particular text and its cultural and generic positioning). While I continue to accept de Man's idea (adapted originally from Claude Lévi-Strauss) of the distinction between myths and already 'demystified' fictions, I have modified my original use of it into an essentially progressive view of the build-up of information within a single study - moving from mythological sub-stratum, to the generic and historical context of each work, and finally to the individual stratagems employed by that work in its attempt to re-create a 'South America' resembling the complexity of the actual South America.

We therefore go from:

- The Utopian/ Dystopian nature of the myths of discovery in Aphra Behn;
- the 'factual' discourse of a travelling Naturalist in Charles Darwin;
- the narrative shaping of historiography in R. B. Cunningham Graham;
- to a working model of the distinction between fictional and non-fictional prose in W. H. Hudson;
- thence to the creation of imaginary countries in fiction in Joseph Conrad;
- to South American quest landscapes in John Masefield;
- to translation from one cultural context to another in Elizabeth Bishop;

and finally to the subversiveness of post-modern genre theory in Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972).

My standards of judgement remain personal and eclectic - reflecting my own historical and cultural subjectivity (the extent to which Latin America's economic and ideological subjection to North America resembles the culturally marginal position of New Zealand *vis-à-vis* Australia and Great Britain, for example) - but they are at least on record. And, since my subject is not South America but 'South America' - not so much a place or even a mental space but a form of words which acts (at least in terms of my analysis) as the ideological centre for each of the books under discussion - it is doubtful whether anyone is better qualified to speak of it than a deracinated European, brought up on images of snow and ice and London weather in a land of rainforest and continual sunshine.

It remains only to say, therefore, that the dependence on textual commentary as a form of argument which will have been apparent even in this preface is not accidental. I highlight short extracts from each work because they represent for me the principal way in which literary criticism can claim for itself a field independent of that of the history of ideas. A false stability is perhaps implied by such close attention to the exact forms of words and phrases, but this may serve also to represent my distrust of any dependence on larger sets of generalizations when treating so inherently unstable a subject.

Of the two questions discussed earlier - the implied distinction between 'South America' and the physical South America; and the ways in which this 'South America' can be distinguished from the 'Africa', 'South-East Asia' and 'Polynesia' of the European imagination - it will by now have become apparent that one cannot be treated independently of the other. Said remarks that it is 'perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated

strangeness', and one might add to this that the imaginative ingredients of such 'transformations' are both limited in number and extremely malleable in character. 'South America', then, is not so much the sum of a particular set of motifs or *topoi*, as of particular arrangements to fit diverse circumstances. So Caliban and the 'noble savage' are not so much South American myths - though both were inspired by reports of the customs of New World Indians - as myths with certain applications in South America. This answer to the conundrum may seem still to be a trifle tentative, but for more details, you will have to read on.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Mythologies of South America

1.1 Theoretical Models

1.1.1 Roland Barthes

There are a number of ways in which one might approach the subject of portrayals of South America in English literature. One possible beginning would be a history of Britain's involvement with the area - the exploration of Guiana, the Scottish Darien scheme, assistance given to the Independence movements during and after the Napoleonic wars - followed by an attempt to link these pragmatic concerns with a tradition of representation¹. Or, alternatively, one could look at a series of representative novels and 'works of the imagination' and attempt to deduce from them some common traits². Or one could produce a negative definition by examining the ways in which pictures of South America in literature differ from pictures of Africa, India, China, and South-East Asia - those other avatars of 'alienness'³.

I do not propose to attempt in detail any of the above, though the project which I shall outline contains something of each of them. One thing is certain: some method of selection must be found to reduce such a potentially overwhelming mound of data to manageable proportions. The first step towards this lies, I feel, in drawing a distinction between the South America of geography and the 'South America' of the imagination. This differentiation is to some extent justified simply by the 'literary' nature of our inquiry; but to explain its implications, I shall be making use of some terms defined by Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies*.

¹As, for example, in Steele's English Interpreters of the Iberian New World.

²Something analogous to Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory (London, 1977), where the literature of the First World War is broken down into a series of thematic categories allegedly central to later Modernist writing.

³This might be done from the works of a particular author, such as Conrad; or, on a larger scale, as part of a general study of European iconographies of the Foreign - as in Honour's The New Golden Land.

In his essay 'Le mythe, aujourd'hui', Barthes offers the following illustration of the distinction between reality (geographical or otherwise) and myth:

La Chine est une chose, l'idée que pouvait s'en faire il n'y a pas longtemps encore, un petit-bourgeois français en est une autre: pour ce mélange spécial de clochettes, de pousse-pousse et de fumeries d'opium, pas d'autre mot possible que celui de *sinité*. Ce n'est pas beau? Que l'on se console au moins en reconnaissant que le néologisme conceptuel n'est jamais arbitraire: il est construit sur une règle proportionnelle fort sensée.⁴

Three points here are worth stressing. There is a country ('*La Chine*'), and there is a popular conception of it ('*sinité*'). It is, however, also essential to note the nature of Barthes' implied observer - *un petit-bourgeois français*. The first two points certainly fit 'South America' as a region of the mind (one might substitute the tango, curare and condors for Barthes' temple-bells, rickshaws and opium-dens). The third is a little more problematic.

Barthes uses the term 'petit-bourgeois' advisedly, convinced as he is of the political motivations lying behind the condensation and over-simplification of experience into mythological patterns. *Sinité*, for him, is the bourgeois myth of China, *la Chine* the reality which must be screened out. In 'Continent perdu', one of the other essays in the same collection, he specifies:

Face à l'étranger, l'Ordre ne connaît que deux conduites qui sont toutes deux de mutilation: ou le reconnaître comme guignol ou le désamorcer comme pur reflet de l'Occident. De toute façon, l'essentiel est de lui ôter son histoire.⁵

This serves to make his political position far clearer. *Sinité* stands for the essentially ahistorical process of imagining foreign peoples either in one's own

⁴Barthes, p.206: 'China is one thing, the idea which a French petit-bourgeois could have of it not so long ago is another: for this peculiar mixture of bells, rickshaws and opium-dens, no other word possible but Sininess. Unlovely? One should at least get some consolation from the fact that conceptual neologisms are never arbitrary: they are built according to a highly sensible proportional rule.' (translations quoted from Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and translated by Annette Lavers (London, 1987) - page numbers thus (121)).

⁵Barthes, p.165: 'Faced with anything foreign, the Established Order knows only two types of behaviour, which are both mutilating: either to acknowledge it as a Punch and Judy show, or to defuse it as a pure reflection of the West. In any case, the main thing is to deprive it of its history.' (96).

image ('pur reflet de l'Occident'), or as a kind of timeless pageant or spectacle ('guignol'), which is indulged in - almost as a function of its being - by 'l'Ordre'. Of course, the problem still remains whether any imagination of the foreignness of a particular people or region can be exempted from this accusation - even the sensitivity of a Lévi-Strauss in Brazil, or of a Barthes before the Japanese culture of *L'Empire des signes* (1970). Nevertheless, whether or not one agrees with Barthes' politics, one can acknowledge his point that the process of mythification is not arbitrary and neither are the forces behind it markedly innocent. For this reason, Barthes favours discourses which emphasize their own stylization and conventions (the language of wrestling, *le catch*, for instance) as opposed to those which aspire to be regarded as a part of reality. For Barthes, myth is the lowest common denominator of impressions. It falsifies by suppressing contradictions and awkwardnesses that do not fit in with its collective world-view. However:

Si paradoxal que cela puisse paraître, *le mythe ne cache rien*: sa fonction est de déformer, non de faire disparaître.⁶

Myths are transparent - but transparently misleading. One inhabits them, as a rule, without knowing they are there. Barthes, however, is convinced of the necessity of recognizing and understanding the nature of a myth before it is possible to step outside its comforting (and reactionary) certainties.

Here the difficulty really begins. Barthes opposes mythological distortions of experience to something called 'reality' which he accepts as an *a priori* quality, and into whose nature he does not inquire very deeply. So far, no doubt, most of us would be in agreement with him - but this sharp distinction does tend to obscure the fact that the difference between a French petit-bourgeois' and a mandarin intellectual's perception of the complexities of a foreign country is more a matter of degree than of essence. Both must, inevitably, simplify and, as it were, 'mythologize' in order to make sense of the data which they receive. What Barthes turns out to be saying, then, must be seen more as a defence of self-consciousness in the construction and recognition of myths, than an alternative way of thought. Since a wholly unprejudiced eye is an impossibility

⁶Barthes, p.207: 'However paradoxical it may seem, myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear.' (121).

(such an observer would have to renounce the capacity to interpret - let alone communicate - what he saw), we must accept that it is a matter of degrees of accuracy of perception rather than a simple dichotomy of reality and distortion. And, to do him justice, Barthes largely acknowledges this:

aujourd'hui, pour le moment encore, il n'y a qu'un choix possible, et ce choix ne peut porter que sur deux méthodes également excessives: ou bien poser un réel entièrement perméable à l'histoire, et idéologiser; ou bien, à l'inverse, poser un réel *finement* impénétrable, irréductible, et, dans ce cas, poétiser.⁷

These two models of reality are both compatible with Barthes' mythological hypothesis - but the modes of analysis which they respectively support might be characterized as belonging to the ideologist and the literary critic (as it is clear that 'poésie', here, implies literary artifice itself). The sharp distinction between 'myth' and 'poetry' as subjects of critical discourse should not, however, blind one to the fact that they are essentially two sides of the same coin:

La poésie occupe la position inverse du mythe: le mythe est un système sémiologique qui prétend se dépasser en système factuel; la poésie est un système sémiologique qui prétend se rétracter en système essentiel.⁸

In other words, 'poetry' (or fiction, as I prefer to call it, for reasons that will shortly become clear) is a system of meaning which aspires to represent reality by laying maximum emphasis on the artifice and fictionality of its own tools. 'Myth', on the other hand, pretends to establish the facts of a situation by excluding all complexities from it. To explain what this means in practice, it will be necessary to mention some more examples from Barthes' collection of essays. '*Le catch*' is a self-conscious myth - one that highlights its own exaggeration of brawling and street-fights - but it is not a fiction. However, to return to Barthes' Chinese

⁷Barthes, p.247: 'there is as yet only one possible choice, and this choice can bear only on two equally extreme methods: either to posit a reality which is entirely permeable to history, and ideologize; or, conversely, to posit a reality which is ultimately impenetrable, irreducible, and, in this case, poetize.' (158).

⁸Barthes, p.220: 'Poetry occupies a position which is the reverse of that of myth: myth is a semiological system which has the pretension of transcending itself into a factual system; poetry is a semiological system which has the pretension of contracting into an essential system.' (134).

example, while the parodic views of China recorded in Ernest Bramah's *The Wallet of Kai Lung* (1900) are certainly mythological, the book itself is a fiction - that is, a piece of writing which is playing on its own nature as writing. Fiction, in this sense, represents a level of language which is aware of the intrinsic paradox of claiming to be about 'not-writing'. It is always conscious of the accepted conventions of representation in any particular field, but it reverses, distorts, or even ironically sustains them in order to convey a more complex picture of things in general. As Paul de Man puts it in *Blindness and Insight* (1971):

the work of fiction invents fictional subjects to create the illusion of the reality of others. But the fiction is not myth, for it knows and names itself as fiction. It is not a demystification, it is demystified from the start.⁹

It has always been obvious that writers were influenced by popular myths about the places they describe. What is less obvious is that their descriptions of those places must at least refer to those myths and conventions (even if only to contradict or subvert them) in order to be understood by their audience. Still less obvious - but no less important - is the fact that their writings will be interpreted according to these conventions whether they wish them to be or not. It is therefore a necessary starting-place in our exploration of European views of South America to isolate and describe some of the basic mythologies of the continent before looking at elaborations upon them.

Myths cannot (by definition) be difficult to find. A myth is a common perception - one that many people share. It is enshrined in clichés and proverbs, in popular literature and popular ideas. Barthes emphasizes that they are multiple, pervasive and ephemeral. They are also interlinked in extremely complicated ways (Barthes' principal theoretical innovation was, indeed, not so much the recognition that there were myths, as the application of semiological techniques to anatomize them). He saw them in the hairstyling conventions in Hollywood's Roman epics, in fashionable photography, even in the face of Brigitte Bardot. They are, in short, phenomena of society's surface.

⁹de Man, p.18.

The fact, however, that he so clearly contrasts 'poésie' and 'un réel entièrement perméable à l'histoire' makes it clear that his primary intention in dealing with myths is to situate apparently 'timeless' ideologies in their contemporary context. He therefore gives examples which are designed to illustrate a number of things simultaneously: First, the inherently distorting quality of those readings and interpretations favoured by 'the Order of Things'; Secondly, the theoretical model of mythologies elaborated by him which allows them to be interpreted according to the laws of the Saussurean sign - on a secondary level of 'signified' and 'signifier'; and, last of all, since he was writing as a journalist, his essays function as parodies of the traditional bourgeois *feuilleton*.

In the case of South America, on the other hand, one cannot confine oneself entirely to these contemporary analyses. Myth-structures can be described running through the entire pattern of European perceptions of the continent from the Conquest till now, and it is these which I am interested in charting. I therefore propose to reverse Barthes' expectations, and argue precisely for that model of 'poésie' as a 'système sémiologique qui prétend se rétracter en système essentiel', which he mentions only to dismiss, in order to make sense of such a *diachronic* as well as *synchronic* expanse. I shall begin by quoting passages from writers who will occupy us at greater length later in this study, and pointing out some of the tacit assumptions behind their remarks. This must, of course, be restricted mainly to the mythological level - leaving speculation about their fictional role to later chapters.

1.2 The New World

1.2.1 Paradise

certainly had his late Majesty, of sacred Memory, but seen and known what a vast and charming World he had been Master of in that Continent, he would never have parted so easily with it to the *Dutch*. 'Tis a Continent, whose vast Extent was never yet known, and may contain more noble Earth than all the Universe beside; for, they say, it reaches from East to West one Way as far as *China*, and another to *Peru*: It affords all Things, both for Beauty and Use; 'tis there eternal Spring, always the very Months of *April*, *May*, and *June*; the Shades are perpetual, the Trees bearing at once all Degrees of Leaves, and Fruit, from blooming Buds to ripe Autumn: Groves of Oranges, Lemons, Citrons, Figs, Nutmegs, and noble Aromatics, continually bearing their Fragrances: The Trees appearing all like Nosegays, adorn'd with Flowers of different Kinds; some are all White, some Purple, some Scarlet, some Blue, some Yellow; bearing at the same Time ripe Fruit, and blooming young, or producing every Day new. The very Wood of all these Trees has an intrinsic Value, above common Timber; for they are, when cut, of different Colours, glorious to behold, and bear a Price considerable, to inlay withal. Besides this, they yield rich Balm, and Gums; so that we make our Candles of such an aromatic Substance, as does not only give a sufficient Light, but as they burn, they cast their Perfumes all about. Cedar is the common Firing, and all the Houses are built with it. The very Meat we eat, when set on the Table, if it be native, I mean of the Country, perfumes the Whole Room; especially a little Beast call'd an *Armadillo*, a Thing which I can liken to nothing so well as a *Rhinoceros*; 'tis all in white Armour, so jointed, that it moves as well in it, as if it had nothing on: This Beast is about the Bigness of a Pig of six Weeks old. But it were endless to give an Account of all the divers wonderful and strange Things that Country affords, and which we took a great Delight to go in Search of; tho' those Adventures are oftentimes fatal, and at least dangerous¹⁰.

This passage comes from *Oroonoko* (1688), a novel by Aphra Behn which I propose to discuss at greater length in Chapter Two. For the moment, however, I will confine myself to those aspects of her work which can be used to illustrate some of the basic myths of South America.

The first thing to be noted is the tone of the passage. It is rapturous - the

¹⁰Behn, V, 178-79.

description of an ideal. The 'Continent of *Surinam*'¹¹ is vast, possibly larger 'than all the Universe beside'. The climate is 'eternal Spring', and the trees afford 'all Things, both for Beauty and Use'. It is not entirely safe, 'those Adventures are oftentimes fatal, and at least dangerous', but 'we fear'd no Harm, nor suffer'd any'¹². It reminds one, in short, of nothing so much as Sir John Mandeville's description of the lands around 'Paradise terrestre' - Taprobane, 'the wilderness wherein groweth the trees of the sonne & the Moone', Pantoroze, and the other 'yles of the land of Prester John', where 'fynde they all marchaundises, & popiniayes, as great plentie as larkes in our countrey'¹³.

Nevertheless, Behn is not simply expressing her delight in the wonders of the new land - there is a clear political purpose in what she says. The book was written in 1688, after the first fervour of the 'scramble for America' had died down; but the other European powers were still looking enviously at Spain and Portugal's possessions in the New World. Both the Dutch and the English were concerned to extend their influence at least over the Caribbean coastline of South America. The fact, then, that a Dutch king had just ascended the throne, driving away the brother of 'his late Majesty, of sacred Memory' gives her remarks about the loss of Surinam to Holland an added point. It is true that she writes more in a spirit of '*ubi sunt*' - the lost glories of America, of the Restoration court - than with a politically subversive message, but this is presumably through prudence rather than apathy. In any case, her portrait of America is no less 'valid' for the subtext discernible in what she says.

This is the first point to make about the views of the New World which we shall be discussing. Political, or any other sort of bias, does not disqualify them as examples - on the contrary, it simply makes them easier to disentangle and clarify. A knowledge of why a writer is describing South America is obviously immensely helpful in determining the extent to which they are governed by convention in

¹¹Behn, V, 177.

¹²Behn, V, 179.

¹³The Voiage and Travayle of Syr John Maundeville Knight with The Journall of Frier Odoricus, edited by Jules Bramont, Everyman's Library (London, 1928), pp.220, 217, 215, 195, 221 & 197.

what they say.

Thus, to turn to one of the first extensive eyewitness accounts of South America in English, Sir Walter Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana* (1596), flattery of a Queen back home can be more important than giving an accurate portrait of the new land:

I made them vnderstand that I was the seruant of a Queene, who was the great *Casique* of the north, and a virgin, and had more *Casiqui* vnder her then there were trees in their iland:¹⁴

Having succeeded in translating the Old World into the terms of the New, he goes on to record the natives' response to this revelation:

I shewed them her maiesties picture which they so admired and honored, as it had beene easie to haue brought them idolatrous thereof.¹⁵

Obviously this was in the hope of pleasing his patron Elizabeth sufficiently to make her favour his ambitions, but the specific mechanism he employed is most interesting. The fact that the flattery is put in the mouths of 'savages' is apparently held to be enough to make it sound disinterested. What reason, after all, could they possibly have for wanting to praise Queen Elizabeth, whom they had never even heard of before? Raleigh presumably made it all up - but if it was actually true, then it would add immeasurably to the Queen's status. Her face alone was enough to inspire idolatry in those who knew no better. Truly, in this case, ignorance was strength - their remarks, like those of children, were valued because one could suppose them to be sincere. This is indeed the first (and still the foremost) thematic significance of South America - the New World. It is fresh and unsophisticated. Life can be started again without the pressure of precedent on every action. Mankind, both *emigré* and indigenous, can be seen in its purest state. Raleigh accordingly concludes:

Guiana is a Countrey that hath yet her Maydenhead, neuer sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not beene torne,

¹⁴Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the large and bewtiful Empire of Guiana*, edited by V. T. Harlow (Amsterdam and New York, 1971), p.15.

¹⁵Raleigh, p.15.

nor the vertue and salt of the soyle spent by manurance, the graues haue not beene opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their Images puld down out of their temples. It hath neuer been entred by any armie of strength, and neuer conquered or possessed by any Christian Prince.¹⁶

This is avowedly an invitation to Englishmen both to take that gold and to settle in this new land (the principal intention of Raleigh's voyage), but Raleigh couches it in terms of a 'New World' myth that would have been familiar to all his readers, and which still survives in various forms today. The strongly sexual content in his image of Guiana as a 'virgin' territory waiting to be entered by Europe is also rather disingenuous. It simultaneously reminds the settlers he is hoping to attract of the charms of the country, and of its guileless inhabitants (both female and male).

To return to Aphra Behn, she has no patroness to placate, nor does she hope to stimulate fresh explorations, but her description, too, is conventionalized to the last degree. I mentioned, above, its resemblance to Mandeville's account of the Earthly Paradise - but probably a better parallel would be with one of the *topoi* in Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948). Specifically, with the *locus amoenus* (or 'delightful spot'). This, in Curtius' schema, includes six separate elements: Springs, Plantations, Gardens, Soft breezes, Flowers, and Bird-voices¹⁷. Only three of these appear in the description I have quoted above (plantations, gardens and flowers) - but if we turn over a page and come to the account of Behn's own residence in the New World, at 'the best House in it ... call'd *St. John's Hill*'¹⁸, we find no fewer than five of the six:

SPRINGS	'the little Waves [of the river] still dashing and washing the Foot of this Rock, made the softest Murmurs and Purlings in the World'
PLANTATIONS	'a Walk, or Grove, of Orange and Lemon-Trees, about half the Length of the <i>Mall</i> here, whose flowery and Fruit-bearing Branches met at the Top, and hinder'd the Sun'

¹⁶Raleigh, p.73.

¹⁷Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, translated by Willard R. Trask, (London, 1979), p.197.

¹⁸Behn, V, 179.

GARDENS	'Not all the Gardens of boasted <i>Italy</i> can produce a Shade to out-vie this, which Nature had join'd with Art to render so exceeding fine'
SOFT BREEZES	'the cool Air that came from the River, made it not only fit to entertain People in, at all the hottest Hours of the Day, but refresh the sweet Blossoms, and made it always sweet and charming'
FLOWERS	'vast Quantities of different Flowers eternally blowing, and every Day and Hour new'
BIRD-VOICES	She mentions none - only 'Tygers' (Jaguars), Snakes, and electric eels. ¹⁹

It is not that Aphra Behn is observing the laws of classical description with any conscious intention. She is, after all, included in the ranks of the 'moderns' in Swift's 'Battle of the Books' (1704). The point of this close correspondence with Curtius' prototype is to show the essentially formulaic nature of her perception of this new 'Universe'. It was thought for a long time that Mrs. Behn had never in fact visited Surinam, and that she was merely 'romancing' when she claimed that her father had been designated 'Lieutenant-General of six and thirty Islands, besides the Continent of *Surinam*'.²⁰ Recent research has however shown less reason to doubt her word on this point²¹, and one may therefore conclude that it is quite likely that she did spend some of her youth in the country. Nevertheless, her description has been shown to have been at least partly lifted from earlier works, among them Warren's *An Impartial Description of Surinam* (1667)²². What this shows, above all, is the extent to which she was dependent on textual precedent for her perception of the landscape around her.

Bearing this in mind, a closer look at the passage quoted at the head of this section will betray a quite clear structure in her seemingly spontaneous description. It resolves itself, to use Curtius' model, into seven elements: 1/Extent, 2/Season, 3/Shade, 4/Trees, 5/Fragrance, 6/Value, 7/Danger. The extent is more

¹⁹Behn, V, 179-83.

²⁰Behn, V, 177.

²¹See especially B. Dhuicq, 'Further Evidence on Aphra Behn's Stay in Surinam', *Notes and Queries*, 26 (1979), 524-26.

²²Montague Summers, 'Memoir of Mrs. Behn', in Behn, I, pp.xv-lxi (p.xix).

'than all the Universe beside', the season 'eternal Spring'. Shades are 'perpetual' ('Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a Shade'²³), and the trees are 'like Nosegays', 'continually bearing their Frangancies'. The timber (and meat) 'if it be native, I mean of the Country' has an 'intrinsic Value' above the common. The 'Adventure' of going in search of these things is 'at least dangerous', but 'we fear'd no Harm, nor suffer'd any'. In short, it 'affords all Things, both for Beauty and Use'.

If we then proceed to link this set of clichés with the cliché 'The New World', we begin to get some inkling of how this particular myth is operating. From at least the time of Amerigo Vespucci, the 'New World' has had a particular symbolic resonance. In terms of traditional Christian theology: God made the World; he made it perfect, in all respects ideal for man (made in his image). It was then corrupted by the Fall. Was the new world fallen, though? A sober view would have to say 'yes', but it could at least provide a symbol of a world unfallen - of an earthly paradise. Thus Indians, in Aphra Behn, are 'like our first Parents before the Fall' and 'represented to me an absolute *Idea* of the first State of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin'²⁴. Hence the references to Eden, Adam, Paradise, Snakes etc. which distinguish almost all European attempts to come to terms with South America. Not that the references are always favourable ones. The idea of South America as Earthly Paradise is one that depends on a train of thought obvious, once it has been formulated, to the European mind. The place itself is thereafter scrutinized to find evidence that conflicts with or supports this extravagant notion. Indians are not perfect, so the notion of them as 'unfallen' is always an easy one to contradict. Mrs. Behn herself treats them with a certain levity later on in her novel, and mentions that:

by the extreme Ignorance and Simplicity of 'em, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant Religion among them, and to impose any Notions or Fictions upon 'em.²⁵

²³The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, Volume 1. *Pastoral Poetry and an Essay on Criticism*, edited by E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London and New Haven, 1961), p.77. (*Pastorals*: 'Summer', l.74).

²⁴Behn, V, 131.

²⁵Behn, V, 186.

The Indians, then, are tried against the idea - not the other way around. They are praised if they match it, and condemned and mocked if they do not. Of course, the idea itself is often scoffed at - but this, in its way, is as effective an acknowledgement of it as any other. Are Indians unfallen or not? Whichever answer you give, you are acknowledging that the question makes sense to you, and that you understand the conventions that it invites you to use in framing your reply.

Once formulated, moreover, a myth with an appeal as universal as this seems to insinuate itself everywhere. Even in Mrs. Behn's time one would have thought it was wearing a little thin. It was, after all, two hundred years after Columbus's arrival. But if anything it appears to have gathered momentum with the passage of time - its great advantage being the ease with which it could evolve to match changing circumstances. For Behn and Montaigne (in his famous essay 'Des Cannibales' (1580)), it was a relief from the artificialities of the Old World, and a chance to castigate them by contrast. Rousseau followed their example, but with a Humanist emphasis on the rectification of Europe by analogy with 'natural' man. For Latin American writers after the wars of independence in the early nineteenth century, the New World myth was an invitation to 'make it new' in a half-literary, half-social sense. Andrés Bello heralded a return to the 'world of Columbus' ²⁶, echoing the spirit of Bolívar's remark:

This country was guided by an instinct that can be called the wisdom of nature itself. There were no known models for its creations, and its doctrines had neither teachers nor examples, so that everything about it was original, and as pure as the inspiration that comes from on high.²⁷

Even in this century, five hundred years after the Discovery (or Conquest), Jorge Luis Borges has denounced this attitude as a tiresome affectation. What is strange, though, is that he criticizes it as an innovation:

Llego a una tercera opinión que he leído hace poco sobre los

²⁶The Penguin Book of Latin American Verse, edited by E. Caracciolo-Trejo (Harmondsworth, 1971), p.395.

²⁷Quoted in Victor Andres Belaunde's preface to Jonathan Norton Leonard, Ancient America, Great Ages of Man (New York, 1968), p.7.

escritores argentinos y la tradición, y que me ha asombrado mucho. Viene a decir que nosotros, los argentinos, estamos desvinculados del pasado; que ha habido como una solución de continuidad entre nosotros y Europa. Según este singular parecer, los argentinos estamos como en los primeros días de la creación; el hecho de buscar temas y procedimientos europeos es una ilusión, un error²⁸.

Thus we come full circle. We have already analyzed Aphra Behn's description of Surinam and found it to consist of seven separate elements - referring to all the expectations which a European could reasonably be presumed to entertain of a place designated as 'The New World'. Enough space and land for everyone (Extent), temperate weather all year round (Season - Spring), Shade from the sun, Trees for commodities and decoration, natural Fragrance (and spices? - the original motive for these explorations), richness and Value (as defined in Europe - the Old World), and finally just enough Danger to make it interesting but not enough to discourage settlement. The same sort of analysis can now perhaps be applied to the whole 'New World' myth - necessarily with less precision - but hopefully clearly enough to illuminate the broad trends of thought associated with it.

NEW WORLD =	The Earthly Paradise
EARTHLY PARADISE =	A Pastoral Arcadia
ARCADIA =	Innocence
INNOCENCE =	Innocent people
INNOCENTS =	Noble Savages
NOBLE SAVAGES =	Childishness and Children
CHILDREN =	Childhood

This, of course, is a model of a model. It gives some idea of the associations which combine to make this myth a discrete entity - while mythological analysis,

²⁸Jorge Luis Borges, 'El escritor argentino y la tradición', in *Prosa completa*, 4 vols (Barcelona, 1985), I, pp.217-25 (p.223): 'I now arrive at a third opinion on Argentine writers and tradition which I have read recently and which has surprised me very much. It says in essence that in Argentina we are cut off from the past, that there has been something like a dissolution of continuity between us and Europe. According to this singular observation, we Argentines find ourselves in a situation like that of the first days of Creation; the search for European themes and devices is an illusion, an error'. (translations quoted from Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (Harmondsworth, 1979) - page numbers thus (217)).

in its turn, is only a device for making sense of innumerable strands of human thought. Nevertheless, despite the fact that none of the transitions are particularly unexpected, they show a progression from the 'New World' to 'Childhood' which might seem a little far-fetched if it were not backed up by our diagram, and the pieces of text which have inspired it.

Freud links childhood to Paradise by emphasizing that all such myths refer to the 'undivided' world of infancy - when satisfaction followed immediately upon desire: the era of 'polymorphous perversity', before the child was taught to postpone fulfilment of its wishes. This, then, is the golden age before the Fall. The concept of 'mythologies of South America' is, however, designed precisely to enable us to discuss the links between such ideas without adopting this or any other 'explanation' of their origins. Freud's seems to me quite a cogent view, but to subscribe to his model would falsify the essentially documentary nature of this study. I am, that is, more of a geographer than a genealogist of ideas. I do not attempt to understand or 'account for' South America - but simply to examine and classify earlier understandings and representations.

We have as yet, though, examined only half of the 'New World' myth as revealed in the works of Aphra Behn.

1.2.2 El Dorado

As we were coming up again, we met with some *Indians* of strange Aspects; that is, of a larger Size, and other sort of Features, than those of our Country ... [who] told us, they had been coming from the Mountains so many Moons as there were Knots [in their 'Cotton String']; they were habited in Skins of a strange Beast, and brought along with 'em Bags of Gold-Dust; ... and offer'd to be the Convoy to any Body, or Persons, that would go to the Mountains ... And because all the Country was mad to be going on this Golden Adventure, the Governor, by his Letters, commanded (for they sent some of the Gold to him) that a Guard should be set at the Mouth of the River of *Amazons* (a River so call'd, almost as broad as the River of *Thames*) and prohibited all People from going up that River, it conducting to those Mountains or Gold.²⁹

In this passage, a little further on in *Oroonoko*, Behn meets some strange Indians: 'that is, of a larger Size, and other sort of Features, than those of our Country'. They use knots instead of writing, like the Incas, and come from 'Mountains' which can only be reached by a long river journey (Behn's ignorance of the true dimensions of the Amazon - 'almost as broad as the River of *Thames* - is amusing, but not significant; she had, after all, never been anywhere near it). They also bear with them 'Bags of Gold-Dust', and the temptation they present is so irresistible that the Governor is forced to set a guard to prevent people from following them.

All this, of course, refers to the legend of El Dorado - the gilded man - which, according to Sir Clements Markham, 'probably originated in a custom which prevailed amongst the civilized Indians of the plateau of Bogota':

When the chief of Guatavita was independent, he made a solemn sacrifice every year ... On the day appointed the chief smeared his body with turpentine, and then rolled in gold dust. Thus gilded and resplendent, he entered the canoe, surrounded by his nobles, whilst an immense multitude of people, with music and songs, crowded round the shores of the lake. Having reached the centre, the chief deposited his offerings of gold, emeralds, and other precious things, and then jumped in himself, to bathe. At this moment the surrounding hills echoed with the applause of the people; and, when the religious ceremony concluded, the dancing, singing, and drinking began.

²⁹Behn, V, 188-89.

News of this, which began to reach the Spanish in the 1540's, focussed their originally more generalized greed for gold and slaves onto a single objective. The city or empire of which El Dorado was said to be ruler was generally assumed to be the last surviving offshoot of the Inca empire (hence the 'Knots' in Aphra Behn - Inca *quipu* strings). It was also associated with the 'Temple of the Sun' discovered by George of Spiers in 1538, and identified with the tribe of the Omaguas by Philip van Hutten in 1544. At first variously located in Amazonia and Bogotá, it gradually shifted eastwards as more and more of these vast new territories were explored - finally coming to rest in the Sierra of Guiana towards the end of the sixteenth century³¹. There it became the 'Manoa' of Antonio de Berrio and Sir Walter Raleigh.

This myth has often been seen as in some sense a 'punishment' for the indiscriminate greed of Europeans, since, as Presbyter Suarez remarks, 'the Indians ... to escape torment, invented all manner of stories of El Dorado'³². Disregarding this teleological interpretation, one can still see the importance of Suarez' remark for our purposes, as it implies very strongly that the idea of immense wealth lost in the jungle predates the specific circumstantial framework which was found for it.

The last two sections of Mrs. Behn's 'Earthly Paradise' description were not very adequately accounted for in our previous reading: the 'Price considerable' borne by the various pieces of flora and fauna described, and the danger of the journeys in search of them. They certainly serve to heighten aesthetically the

³⁰Clements R. Markham, 'Introduction', in Fray Pedro Simon, The Expedition of Pedro de Ursua and Lope de Aguirre in Search of El Dorado and Omagua in 1560-1, translated by William Bollaert, The Hakluyt Society, 28 (London, 1861), pp.i-liii (p.ii).

³¹Information from Raleigh, pp.xlv-xcv.

³²Raleigh, p.li.

sense of wonder evoked by 'my America! my new-found-land'³³: but they are not really represented in the table which we compiled. Behn goes on to give a long and circumstantial account of a 'tyger' hunt, which again does not match the picture of a world where the lion lies down with the lamb.

If, however, we take a slightly different slant from our cliché 'The New World', we find that this too can be included. What, after all, does one do with a new world? Alexander lamented having no more worlds to conquer - Cecil Rhodes lamented having no time left to conquer them ('there is your hinterland'). To Shakespeare's Miranda (or John Donne), a new world is a place to wonder at: 'O brave new world/ That has such people in't!'³⁴. To their contemporary Raleigh (and his predecessors the Conquistadors) it was a place to conquer and rule - a source of wealth and power. Money is most easily comprehensible in terms of gold, and power in terms of slaves - and both were readily available in the 'New World' of South America. I would therefore propose a pattern much as follows (along the lines of the associations of ideas recorded in the last section - but still recognizably a 'New World' *topos*):

NEW WORLD =	Conquest
CONQUEST =	Power (slaves); Wealth (gold)
GOLD & SLAVES =	Golden Indians
GOLDEN INDIANS =	El Dorado
EL DORADO =	A Lost city

This is the sort of thinking that inspired both the earliest chroniclers of South America (Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz, and other writer-conquistadors), and their successors - Raleigh, Fray Simon, and Aphra Behn. It is a blend of the strictly historical with the mythological. America was a new world - it must contain gold and slaves. New worlds, since Alexander, were well known to do so. Cortés and Pizarro had applied such a model to their new and alien surroundings and found

³³John Donne, *Poetical Works*, edited by H. J. C. Grierson (Oxford, 1971), p.107. (*Elegie XIX*: 'Going to Bed', l.27).

³⁴*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford, 1986), p.1338. (*The Tempest*, V.1.186-87).

it adequate. Vague stories of 'golden cities' in the hinterland had led them to Tenochtitlán and Cuzco. The myth of El Dorado, by contrast, seems if anything to have thrived upon failure. Not only did new expeditions continue to search for the 'golden man' even after the failure of Raleigh - but each new writer tried to descry the 'truth' of the matter, postulating the usual panoply of lost tribes of Israel, colonists from Atlantis, and offshoots from Ancient Egypt to supplement the original notion of a sister-empire to the Incas. Aphra Behn, as we have seen above, simply repeats the main lines of the story - carefully including all the major elements (the Inca origins, the gold, even the mountains - the few clues which the searchers believed themselves to possess).

'El Dorado' thus came to have another set of associations as well - associations bound up with the very difficulty of the quest for the city of the 'gilded man'. The terrain which the searchers had to traverse was as difficult as any in the world (few of the early expeditions had lost less than half their men - and some had been wiped out altogether³⁵). El Dorado had therefore become a symbol of the unattainable and inaccessible - and was accordingly associated thematically with the impenetrable undergrowth of the South American rainforest, the swollen immensity of its rivers, and the sheer faces of its mountains. A further paradigm therefore projects itself from the last:

LOST CITY =	Lost, hidden
LOST, HIDDEN =	Impenetrable forests;
	Impassable mountains;
	Unbridgeable rivers;
	Unbounded plains
FOREST =	Matto Grosso, Darien
MOUNTAINS =	The Andes, the Cordillera
RIVERS =	Amazon, Orinoco
PLAINS =	Pampas, Llanos

Our series of 'searchers for El Dorado' can therefore continue up to the present day and include archaeologists like Hiram Bingham (discoverer of Macchu Picchu), Stephens and Catherwood (explorers of the lost and overgrown

³⁵ Aguirre in 1561 turned pirate and was finally executed; Alfinger in 1532 left only 'a few worn-out stragglers'; Maldonado and Tortoya's expedition were all killed or captured by the 'savage Chunchos'. (Raleigh, pp.xlviii & lxxv).

cities of the Maya), and Colonel Percy Fawcett, whose search for a 'lost city' in the Matto Grosso ended in tragedy in the 1920s.

In literature, one should cite Romances of 'lost cities' (like John Masefield's *Lost Endeavour* (1910)), but also the numerous works which hinge on the meaningless immensity of Amazonia and other jungle regions (Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1934), for example - or Werner Herzog's film *Aguirre der Zorn Gottes* (1972)). The hero of W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions* (1904) retains a vague sense that he stumbled through the streets of Manoa in delirium after the death of his beloved Rima - and this half-recollection is perhaps as sensitive an employment as any.

The mythological associations of this view of 'South America' do not, however, end there.

1.3 The Gaucho

1.3.1 Machismo

General Rosas is also a perfect horseman - an accomplishment of no small consequence in a country where an assembled army elected its general by the following trial: A troop of unbroken horses being driven into a corral, were let out through a gateway, above which was a cross-bar; it was agreed whoever should drop from the bar on one of these wild animals, as it rushed out, and should be able, without saddle or bridle, not only to ride it, but also to bring it back to the door of the corral, should be their general. The person who succeeded was accordingly elected; and doubtless made a fit general for such an army. This extraordinary feat has also been performed by Rosas.³⁶

I mentioned 'unbounded plains' in the last section - and it is true that Doré's picture of the quest for El Dorado shows a group of knights lost on an illimitable desert - however the usual association of ideas equates the search for gold (or lost civilizations) with mountains, rivers, and trees. The plains have their own mythology, bound up principally with the charismatic figure of the gaucho.

The quotation above, from Darwin's *Journal of Researches*, refers to his encounter with Juan Manuel Rosas, later dictator of Argentina, and at that time engaged in the extermination of all the Indians in the country. Despite the slightly patronizing air in his remarks, one can sense Darwin's real admiration for Rosas and his gauchos. He says, in fact, a little earlier: 'There is high enjoyment in the independence of the Gaucho life - to be able at any moment to pull up your horse, and say, "Here we will pass the night"',³⁷. The first words, then, to be associated with the idea of the gaucho are freedom and independence. He represents the masculine ideal of having no ties and no domestic encumbrances. The gaucho is the man alone, the adventurer with only his faithful horse for company.

³⁶Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage of H. M. S. 'Beagle' Round the World*, second edition, Sir John Lubbock's Hundred Books, 2 (London, 1891), p.53.

³⁷Darwin, *Journal*, p.50.

Perhaps the best summary of the gaucho lifestyle comes from Colonel Sarmiento's book *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845). He describes their education as follows:

Los niños ejercitan sus fuerzas y se adiestran por placer en el manejo del lazo y de las boleadoras, con que molestan y persiguen sin descanso a las terneras y cabras; ... más tarde, y cuando ya son fuertes, recorren los campos cayendo y levantando, rodando a designio en las vizcacheras, salvando precipios y adiestrándose en el manejo del caballo; cuando la pubertad asoma, se consagran a domar potros salvajes y la muerte es el castigo menor que les aguarda, si un momento les faltan las fuerzas o el coraje. Con la juventud primera viene la completa independencia y la desocupación.³⁸

Emphasizing this last point of 'desocupación', Sarmiento specifies that 'todas las ocupaciones domésticas, todas las industrias caseras, las ejerce la mujer; sobre ella pesa casi todo el trabajo: y gracias si algunos hombres se dedican a cultivar un poco de maíz para el alimento de la familia'³⁹. Sarmiento was Argentinian, though too much of a town-dweller to be a gaucho himself (Darwin points out that the term actually means 'countrymen'⁴⁰), and one can already see a certain nostalgia and idealization creeping into his account:

¿Cuánto no habrá podido contribuir a la independencia de una parte de la América la arrogancia de estos gauchos argentinos que nada han visto bajo el sol mejor que ellos, ni el hombre sabio ni el poderoso? El europeo es para ellos el último de todos, porque no

³⁸Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie*, Colección Hispánica (New York, 1961), p.41: 'The boys exercise their strength and amuse themselves by gaining skill in the use of the lasso and the bolas, with which they constantly harass and pursue the calves and goats ... When they become stronger, they race over the country, falling off their horses and getting up again, tumbling on purpose into rabbit burrows, scrambling over precipices, and practicing feats of horsemanship. On reaching puberty, they take to breaking wild colts, and death is the least penalty that awaits them if their strength or courage fails them for a moment. With early manhood comes complete independence and idleness.' (translations quoted from Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants, or, Civilization and Barbarism*, translated by Mrs. Horace Mann (New York, 1961) - page numbers thus (37)).

³⁹Sarmiento, p.41: 'All domestic occupations are performed by women; on them rests the burden of all the labor, and it is an exceptional favor when some of the men undertake the cultivation of a little maize'. (37).

⁴⁰Darwin, *Journal*, p.112.

resiste a un par de corcovos del caballo.⁴¹

The questionable political equation of the 'independencia' of gaucho life with the 'independencia' of the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata is made even more suspect when the discussion turns to the poetry of the plains. We begin to see the authoritarian outlines of the gaucho myth taking full, mystical form:

¿qué impresiones ha de dejar en el habitante de la República Argentina el simple acto de clavar los ojos en el horizonte, y ver ..., no ver nada? Porque cuanto más hunde los ojos en aquel horizonte incierto, vaporoso, indefinido, más se aleja, más los fascina, lo confunde y lo sume en la contemplación y la duda.⁴²

To freedom and independence, then, we must add an element of existential doubt - a world where one's very identity begins to shift, and where the only meaning is confined to action. Sarmiento continues:

¿Dónde termina aquel mundo que quiere en vano penetrar? ¡No lo sabe! ¿Qué hay más allá de lo que ve? La soledad, el peligro, el salvaje, la muerte. He aquí ya la poesía. El hombre que se mueve en estas escenas se siente asaltado de temores e incertidumbres fantásticas, de sueños que lo preocupan despierto.⁴³

'La soledad, el peligro, el salvaje, la muerte' - it is easy to see that discussions of the 'significance' of the gaucho lend themselves very easily to inflated romantic flourishes; but that is not the extent of his influence on Argentine letters. Borges has deplored the tendency to take the vocabulary and attitudes of 'poesía

⁴¹Sarmiento, p.42: 'To what extent may not the independence of that part of America be due to the arrogance of these Argentine gauchos, who have never seen anything beneath the sun superior to themselves in wisdom or in power? The European is in their eyes the most contemptible of all men, for a horse gets the better of him in a couple of plunges.' (38).

⁴²Sarmiento, p.45: 'what impressions must be made upon the inhabitant of the Argentine Republic by the simple act of fixing his eyes upon the horizon, and seeing nothing? - for the deeper his gaze sinks into that shifting, hazy, undefined horizon, the further it withdraws from him, the more it fascinates and confuses him, and plunges him in contemplation and doubt.' (41).

⁴³Sarmiento, p.45: 'What is the end of that world which he vainly seeks to penetrate? He knows not! What is there beyond what he sees? The wilderness, danger, the savage, death! Here is poetry already; he who moves among such scenes is assailed by fantastic doubts and fears, by dreams which possess his waking hours.' (41).

gauchesca' as an archetype for contemporary writers, commenting that 'un colombiano, un mexicano o un español pueden comprender inmediatamente las poesías de los payadores, de los gauchos, y en cambio necesitan un glosario para comprender, siquiera aproximadamente, a Estanislao del Campo o Ascasubi'⁴⁴. This is, of course, due to the fact that (as Borges points out) it is only to a non-gauche that the gaucho lifestyle and habits appear remarkable and worthy of reverence. Thus we find poems like Hernández' *Martín Fierro* (1872), which even Borges acknowledges to be 'la obra más perdurable que hemos escrito los argentinos'⁴⁵, being regarded as the Argentine equivalent of the Homeric poems, 'nuestra Biblia, nuestro libro canónico'⁴⁶.

It is scarcely possible to overestimate the influence of this myth on Argentinian literature. Ricardo Güiraldes dedicates his novel *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926) (which 'occupies in Argentinian letters a place not unrelated to that of *Huckleberry Finn* in the literature of the United States'⁴⁷): 'Al gaucho que llevo en mí, sacramento, como la custodia lleva la hostia'⁴⁸. He extends these highflown sentiments to his account of the gaucho 'code' of conduct:

la resistencia y la entereza en la lucha, el fatalismo en aceptar sin rezongos lo sucedido, la fuerza moral ante las aventuras sentimentales, la desconfianza para con las mujeres y la bebida, la prudencia entre los forasteros, la fe en los amigos.⁴⁹

⁴⁴Borges, I, 219: 'a Colombian, Mexican or Spaniard can immediately understand the poetry of the payadores, of the gauchos, and yet they need a glossary in order to understand, even approximately, Estanislao del Campo [author of Fausto (1870)] or Ascasubi.' (213).

⁴⁵Borges, I, 218: 'the most lasting work we Argentines have written'. (211).

⁴⁶Borges, I, 218: 'our Bible, our canonical book.' (211).

⁴⁷Waldo Frank, 'Introduction', in Ricardo Güiraldes, Don Segundo Sombra: Shadows on the Pampas, translated by Harriet de Onís, (West Drayton, Middlesex, 1948), pp.vi-viii. (the translation from which I shall be quoting - page numbers thus (vii)).

⁴⁸Ricardo Güiraldes, Don Segundo Sombra, in Obras completas, edited by Juan José Güiraldes and Augusto Mario Delfino (Buenos Aires, 1962), pp.345-497 (p.346): 'To the gaucho I bear within me, sacredly, as the monstrance bears the holy wafer'. (v).

⁴⁹Güiraldes, p.390: 'courage and fairness in the fight, love of one's fate whatever it might be, strength of character in affairs of the heart, caution with women and liquor, reserve among strangers, faith to friends.' (61).

The gaucho might be taken to represent freedom, fatalism, and justice - if one were to subscribe entirely to this reading. But there is another side as well (perhaps better represented in European than Latin American literature) but rather less favourable to this 'lone man on a horse'. W. H. Hudson comments of the gauchos he grew up among: 'they loved to kill a man not with a bullet but in a manner to make them know and feel that they were really and truly killing'⁵⁰. And in his biography of R. B. Cunninghame Graham, another 'gaucho-ized' European, A. F. Tschiffely remarks:

When passing a river, if he could avoid it, no man rode into the water first, especially if he wore silver spurs or reins, for it might chance that he received a knife-thrust in the back from a too admiring friend, or perhaps merely because the sudden lust to kill, so frequent amongst dwellers of the plains, rose in the heart of the man who followed immediately behind.⁵¹

We can thus see two overlapping perceptions of the gaucho - one (represented by Hudson and R. B. Cunninghame Graham) seeing him as an instinctively free, instinctively violent, child of nature; and the other (represented by Güiraldes and the 'gauchesque' poets) seeing him as the ideal 'man without women', stern and just, like the shadowy Don Segundo Sombra. Interestingly, neither group identifies directly with the gauchos - Hudson and Graham preserve their European distance, and even Güiraldes' narrator is forced to abandon his mentor when he inherits an estancia - but perhaps this is an essential part of the mystique. In any case, one might sum up the literary *topos* as follows:

GAUCHO =	Freedom;
	Independence (Sarmiento)
FREEDOM =	Wide plains;
	Horses;
	Violence (Hudson and Graham)
VIOLENCE =	Impulse (Güiraldes)
IMPULSE =	Unpredictability (Borges)
UNPREDICTABILITY =	Machismo

Darwin, Hudson and Sarmiento could observe the gauchos at first hand, but

⁵⁰W. H. Hudson, Far Away and Long Ago: A History of My Early Life (London, 1925), p.124.

⁵¹A. F. Tschiffely, Don Roberto: Being the Account of the Life and Works of R. B. Cunninghame Graham, 1852-1936 (London, 1937), p.51.

we are no longer able to do so. It would therefore be necessary, in order to get the full force of the contemporary gaucho myth, to add 'GAUCHO = A lost way of life'.

This myth might seem most useful for interpreting the literature of the Argentine and its closest neighbour Uruguay, but it is by no means confined to them. Similar cowboy-like figures roam the Llanos of Venezuela and the *sertão* of Brazil. Also, the point has been made that a certain laconic and casual attitude towards danger and death is a strand to be observed running through most of the literature of South America - and it seems appropriate to link the idealization of the gaucho with this. In Borges' later short stories, for example, the aesthetic appreciation of 'witty' behaviour - such as the story of the two brothers who, instead of fighting over a girl, decide to kill her instead⁵² - becomes a definite motif. In his case, it recalls the similar codes of behaviour in saga literature - where the matter-of-fact acceptance of death and 'necessary murder' is endemic. Elsewhere, however, it seems to refer directly to the strain of humour to be found in anecdotes about gauchos - such as some of those Darwin repeats about Rosas: the time that he had himself put in the stocks for infringing one of his own regulations, and then imprisoned his steward for releasing him; the court jester who remarked: 'when the general laughs he spares neither mad man nor sound'.⁵³

This exaltation of cruelty can be traced in many works of Latin American literature, and deserves more extensive discussion on its own - for the moment, however, we can sum up the gaucho by saying that he is, in an almost Hemingwayesque sense, the 'natural man'. He reacts, but does not brood upon his decisions. He is suspicious of language and glib speech, and will kill either friend or stranger at the slightest provocation.

⁵²'La intrusa', in Borges, IV, pp.15-18.

⁵³Darwin, *Journal*, p.53.

The association of this set of attitudes with *machismo* is a fairly natural one - since women, in gaucho stories like *Don Segundo Sombra*, bring nothing but trouble. Its links with the motifs of violent revolution and carnival may seem a little harder to establish but, as we shall see in the next section, this too forms one of the staples of literary idealizations of South America.

1.3.2 Carnival

Si en la vida diaria nos ocultamos a nosotros mismos, en el remolino de la Fiesta nos disparamos. Más que abrirnos, nos desgarramos. Todo termina en alarido y desgarradura: el canto, el amor, la amistad. La violencia de nuestros festejos muestra hasta qué punto nuestro hermetismo nos cierra las vías de comunicación con el mundo. Conocemos el delirio, la canción, el aullido y el monólogo, pero no el diálogo. Nuestras Fiestas, como nuestras confidencias, nuestros amores y nuestras tentativas por reordenar nuestra sociedad, son rupturas violentas con lo antiguo o con lo establecido. Cada vez que intentamos expresarnos, necesitamos romper con nosotros mismos. Y la Fiesta sólo es un ejemplo, acaso el más típico, de ruptura violenta.⁵⁴

The novel *Terra Nostra* (1975) by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes has been described (by a reviewer in *The Times*⁵⁵) as 'a fresh, cruel look at western humanity'. This attitude of half-fascination, half-repulsion for the everyday cruelty which is allegedly a feature of Latin American life, can be observed in a great deal that is written about the area - South and Central America as well as Mexico. In the passage quoted above, from the essay 'Todos santos, día de muertos' in his book *El laberinto de la soledad* - interestingly, the English translator prefers the resonant title 'The Day of the Dead' - Octavio Paz attempts to analyze some of the sources of this obsession. The terminology he uses in doing so gives us a clue to the larger implications of this particular myth:

La Fiesta es una Revuelta, en el sentido literal de la palabra. En la confusión que engendra, la sociedad se disuelve, se ahoga, en tanto que organismo regido conforme a ciertas reglas y principios. Pero se ahoga en sí misma, en su caos o libertad original. Todo se

⁵⁴Paz, pp.47-48: 'If we hide within ourselves in our daily lives, we discharge ourselves in the whirlwind of the fiesta. It is more than an opening out: we rend ourselves open. Everything - music, love, friendship - ends in tumult and violence. The frenzy of our festivals shows the extent to which our solitude closes us off from communication with the world. We are familiar with delirium, with songs and shouts, with the monologue ... but not with the dialogue. Our fiestas, like our confidences, our loves, our attempts to re-order our society, are violent breaks with the old or the established. Each time we try to express ourselves we have to break with ourselves. And the fiesta is only one example, perhaps the most typical, of this violent break.' (45).

⁵⁵Quoted in Carlos Fuentes, *Terra Nostra*, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden, (Harmondsworth, 1978).

comunica; se mezcla el bien con el mal, el día con la noche, lo santo con lo maldito.⁵⁶

Paz sees an equation between the 'hermetismo' (secrecy) that is characteristic of his region and its discharge in 'el remolino de la Fiesta'. The fiesta itself is merely a symbol for the 'ruptura violenta' which this kind of society feels periodically called upon to make. One name for this kind of reversal of the conventional order is carnival or fiesta (the *Saturnalia* of the Romans) - another is revolution. He specifies in the second quotation that in these upheavals society 'se ahoga en sí misma', in its original 'caos o libertad' - a good metaphor for the kinds of ideological shift required for a thinker like Sarmiento to reconcile his own 'civilized' existence with the chaotic freedom of gaucho life. Indeed, one might almost say that it is a 'town and country' dialectic inescapable for Latin Americans concerned about their own identity.

The association of political upheaval with public discharges of emotion is therefore as common in Latin American writing as it is in the sometimes facetious commentaries of Europeans:

The revolutions in these countries are quite laughable; some few years ago in Buenos Ayres, they had 14 revolutions in 12 months. - things go as quietly as possible; both parties dislike the sight of blood; & so that the one which appears the strongest gains the day. - The disturbances do not much affect the inhabitants of the town, for both parties find it best to protect private property.⁵⁷

'Fiesta' and 'Revolution' are the lighter and darker sides, respectively, of the same sense of upheaval and violence. Which of them one emphasizes depends to a large extent on one's own contingent position. Against Darwin's flippancy one could therefore cite 'dictator' novels like Miguel Ángel Asturias' *El Señor*

⁵⁶Paz, p.46: 'The fiesta is a revolution in the most literal sense of the word. In the confusion that it generates, society is dissolved, is drowned, in so far as it is an organism ruled according to certain laws and principles. But it drowns in itself, in its own original chaos or liberty. Everything is united: good and evil, day and night, the sacred and the profane.' (43).

⁵⁷Charles Darwin's *Beagle Diary*, edited by Richard Darwin Keynes (Cambridge, 1988), p.85.

Presidente (1946) and García Márquez' *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) as well as in analyses like Paz's. The train of associations seldom ends there, however - the 'religions of death' which dominated Southern America before the Spanish conquest are usually held to have something to do with this fatalistic acceptance of everyday violence, along with the atrocities perpetrated by the first settlers: the '*leyenda negra*' of Spanish brutality and cruelty referred to by Raleigh in his *Discoverie of Guiana*.

A paradigm for this set of ideas might take the following form:

FREEDOM =	Impulse
IMPULSE =	Violence, cruelty
VIOLENCE =	Revolution
REVOLUTION =	Reversal, <i>bouleversement</i>
REVERSAL =	Carnival

Thus, representations of 'South American' revolution generally include many of the concomitants of classical carnival - the pope of fools, the jester or mountebank, and also the reversal of men and women's roles. Nor do these operate solely on a political level - the idea of the 'reversal' of dead and living (referred to in the title of Paz's essay) is no less important in books such as Lowry's *Under the Volcano* or Asturias' *Mulata de tal* (1963) than the need to purge society of the meaningless masks and façades of authority.

Further associations of the 'carnival' myth in the literature of South America accordingly include the violent alternation of conservative and radical political parties - invariably defined in terms of 'black and white'; absolute good and absolute evil (though which is which depends on the writer's own bias). The motif is mocked in Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*:

Como Aureliano tenía en esa época nociones muy confusas sobre las diferencias entre conservadores y liberales, su suegro le daba lecciones esquemáticas. Los liberales, le decía, eran masones; gente de mala índole, partidaria de ahorcar a los curas, de implantar el matrimonio civil y el divorcio ... Los conservadores, en cambio, que habían recibido el poder directamente de Dios, propugnaban por la estabilidad del orden público y la moral

familiar⁵⁸.

Márquez' sympathies, like those of most Latin American writers, appear to be with the labelled progressives (like those of his character, the future Colonel Aureliano Buendía). In John Masefield's *Odtaa*, however, advocacy of the 'white' position is unalloyed by irony:

the dirty way is the way the Reds take by nature, being what they are, people without dignity and without belief.⁵⁹

Again, one might make the point that the attitudes associated with being on the outside looking in are significantly different from those of the 'criollo' inhabitants of America.

One might, then, summarize these further shifts as follows:

REVOLUTION =	Alternation
ALTERNATION =	Political parties
PARTIES =	Red (radical);
	White (conservative);
	'Black and white' judgements
RED =	Radical;
	Atheistic, 'Native', Cruel
WHITE =	Conservative;
	God-fearing, Catholic, Reactionary

Thus we can see monocular partisanship as an essential addition to the mythological train of thought running from Freedom, to Revolution, to Cruelty, to Death, to Fiesta and the 'Day of the Dead'.

It would be easy to go on to examine other myths, but it will be apparent by now that the task is a potentially infinite one. All one can do is present a

⁵⁸Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad*, edited by Joaquín Marco (Madrid, 1985), p.148: 'Since Aureliano at that time had very confused notions about the difference between Conservatives and Liberals, his father-in-law gave him some schematic lessons. The Liberals, he said, were Freemasons, bad people, wanting to hang priests, to institute civil marriage and divorce ... The Conservatives, on the other hand, who had received their power directly from God, proposed the establishment of public order and family morality.' (translations quoted from Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, translated by Gregory Rabassa (London, 1980) - page numbers thus (84)).

⁵⁹John Masefield, *Odtaa: A Novel* (London, 1927), p.55.

selection. What is more, the law of Diminishing Returns operates particularly fiercely in this field: even the myths which I have outlined overlap with one another, and make more sense in the aggregate than they do separately. If one subjects them to too close a scrutiny they begin to dissolve into random pieces of colour - it is only from a slight distance that the picture makes sense.

Myths do exist, as Roland Barthes has demonstrated - and all of us order our lives by them, whether we are aware of the fact or not. In purely literary terms, however, a myth tends to stand for the tension between opposing tendencies - with the oddity that even its seemingly outmoded aspects can be continuously revived, thanks to their nature as texts. There are obvious distinctions to be made between the four myths that I have discussed in this chapter - the 'New World', for example, being both the most long-lived and the most adaptable to shifts of fashion; while 'El Dorado' and the gaucho are most specifically linked to particular historical phenomena (not that that in any way reduces their significance in either the textual or worldly realms). 'Carnival', finally, is perhaps the myth which has been subjected to the the weightiest deliberations in Latin America itself. Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Miguel Ángel Asturias and Gabriel García Márquez constitute a particularly impressive line of authority.

Of course, this is to some extent to be disingenuous. Another division could be made between 'myths of exploitation' and 'myths of the exploited' - associated, respectively, with the European and Latin American traditions. The 'El Dorado' myth is shamelessly acquisitive, but the insensitivity to the native cultures of the New World displayed by those who cast its inhabitants as shepherds in an Arcadian landscape has been perhaps even more damaging psychologically in the long run. Hence the periodic crises of American 'identity' in respect to Europe; hence also the idealization of cruelty and stoicism, as personified in the figure of the gaucho, adopted by Latin Americans in order to break out of this mould.

I acknowledge the force of this reading, and hope that a count of the passages in Spanish and English in the two mythological 'sections' in question will make it clear that I do see a dichotomy in the employment of these motifs by British and South American writers (to adopt the more narrow terminology demanded by the scope of my topic). I must conclude, however, that the choice between a reading

'entièrement perméable à l'histoire' and one which, on the contrary, decides to 'poétiser', which I made at the beginning of this chapter, was not a casual one. These myths have been used to justify oppression and exploitation, and yet to equate them with that injustice *tout court* would be to carry the argument too far. For myself, I see more value in a reading of successive fictional 'versions' of the continent in terms of their ability to create a South America

The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.⁶⁰

A 'South America', that is, which might be in some ways adequate to the original. And it is my hope (a pious one, perhaps) that by pursuing this task more can be done to disentangle the processes involved in the persistent 'mythologizing' of other peoples and cultures, than by attempting to ignore altogether the aesthetic imperatives of richness and delight which inspired the authors I am studying.

⁶⁰W. B. Yeats, The Poems: A New Edition, edited by Richard J. Finneran (London, 1984), p.320. ('The Municipal Gallery Re-visited', l.12).

PART 1
Exploration

Chapter 2

Behn and the Discoverers

2.1 Saussure

In the previous chapter I looked at the mythological foundations of any 'fictional' version of South America in the European tradition. It is now time to discuss the techniques which I shall be employing in order to distinguish between mythological and fictional readings of the same works.

I have already mentioned some of the problems caused by the geographical overlapping of the entities known as 'South' and 'Latin' America, but the difficulties presented by the chronological scope of our study have not yet been made apparent. The best way to illustrate this is perhaps by looking at a single iconic picture of South America, and examining the various different ways in which it could be investigated. The picture which I have chosen - composite of a number of similar scenes - is called 'Columbus on the beach'. It exists in two forms. In one, Columbus is stepping onto the beach at San Salvador, clad in full armour and surrounded by kneeling natives. In the other, Columbus is kneeling on the beach and giving thanks to heaven for his deliverance and that of his crew. Innocent, unclad natives look on in awe and incomprehension.

I shall be looking at the ideological implications of this scene in more detail later. For the moment, what should concern us is the status of Columbus himself. As an historical figure - and since history is the study of documents and documentation - it is clear that Columbus exists for us in the form of texts. But precisely which texts? There are, of course, his various surviving letters to the Monarchs of Spain. These are at least contemporary with his voyages, although they have the disadvantage, at least for purposes of strict veracity, of being written as propaganda for his discoveries (in much the same way as Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana*, discussed above). Then there is his *Journal*, transcribed and edited after

his death by Bartolomé de las Casas, and not published in full until 1825¹. Alternatively, one could turn to third-person accounts: the *Historie* by Don Fernando Colón, the Admiral's son, which only survives in Italian translation as *Vita dell Ammiraglio* (1571)²; Washington Irving's *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), with its sequel *The Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus* (1831); or, more recently, Samuel Eliot Morison's *Admiral of the Ocean Sea* (1942). A study of the figure of Columbus in imaginative literature, on the other hand, might make its choice between Joel Barlow's epic poem *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) (revised and expanded as *The Columbiad* (1807)); J. H. Campe's *Die Entdeckung von Amerika* (1780-81) (translated into English as *The Discovery of America, for the use of children and young persons* (1799); Paul Claudel and Darius Milhaud's *Livre de Christophe Colomb*, first performed in 1930; or Michel de Ghelderode's *Christophe Colomb*, performed in 1929 but not published until 1954. His voyages have inspired a series of novels - notably Stephen Marlowe's *The Memoirs of Christopher Columbus* (1987), but also children's books such as C. Walter Hodges' *Columbus Sails* (1939) and Gordon Stable's *Westward with Columbus* (1894), not to mention Rafael Sabatini's *Columbus: A Romance* (1943) or the recent English translation of Abel Posse's *The Dogs of Paradise* (1987).

If, then, we perceive the history of America as a horizontal ribbon of time, we can see these varying treatments of Columbus as a series of vertical axes passing through it - preserving the intellectual and stylistic emphases of five centuries of European and American culture. We therefore have a choice of levels - we can look at Columbus vertically, examining the variations in his projected image and relating these to the intellectual currents of the day; or horizontally, attempting to reconstruct the day-to-day reactions of the Admiral and his contemporaries to the new discoveries. The corner of our graph is accordingly set on 1492 (for the

¹Information from Clements R. Markham, 'Introduction. I. - Journal of Columbus', in *The Journal of Christopher Columbus (During his First Voyage, 1492-93) ...*, translated by Clements R. Markham, Hakluyt Society, 86 (London, 1893), pp.i-ix (p.vi).

²*The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by His Son Ferdinand*, translated and annotated by Benjamin Keen (London, 1960).

purposes of this specific image), and its two axes are, respectively, chronology and textuality, both of them running up to the present day. Each of the texts about Columbus which I have mentioned represents simultaneously an attempt to reconstruct the events of 1492 (within the technical constraints of each genre), and the attitudes of its own historical moment. What is more, many of these works set up their own methodological difficulties - Don Fernando Colón's biography of his father, for example, having been composed in the last years of his life (he died in 1539); then read and quoted by various near-contemporaries such as Las Casas; then translated (inaccurately) into Italian by Alfonso Ulloa and published in Venice; and finally lost or destroyed in its original form. Which of these dates should we take account of when speaking of the historical 'moment' of this work? Presumably the answer must be, both the (unknown) period of composition and the moment(s) of the work's first publication and diffusion.

Problems of methodology similar to this were dealt with by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916)³, where he made an influential distinction between the *synchronic* and the *diachronic* approaches to semiotic (sign) systems. The diachronic approach examines objects historically, in terms of individual cause-and-effect - the standard example being Historical Linguistics. The synchronic approach studies the system which exists at a particular time, and defines the signs in question in terms of their function within that system. The diachronic, then, is our horizontal ribbon of time - but the synchronic is not precisely our vertical extension to the graph. It is, rather, a vertical, unextended section cut through the diachronic line of history. It cannot continue upwards into subsequent eras and modes of representation.

The advantage of a synchronic mode of analysis is that it eliminates, at a stroke, the necessity to supply a family-tree of causation for every item within a system (a task impossibly vast) - simply because the origin of these factors would not help to define their place within that system. It is thus apparent that there is no advantage to be served in extending our vision above the horizontal base-line

³Translated by Wade Baskin as *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger (London, 1964).

of our examination, since this would simply multiply - without clarifying - the objects under investigation. Nor is there any purpose, in a study of this kind, in trying to compete with the numerous excellent (diachronic) histories of Columbus's life and times which already exist. Our purpose is to reconstruct a textual system - the particular implications of the words 'South America' which suggested the way in which one author chose to represent it at a particular time - and in order to do this our choice of texts must be chronologically consistent.

Of course, this is to make things a little too simple. The objects of Saussure's investigation were languages, ideal for his purposes because of the arbitrariness both of *signifier* (few words can be accounted for either by onomatopoeia or euphony), and *signified* (if concepts were constant from language to language translation would be an exact science). It was therefore easy for him to argue that language must be divided into two categories: *langue* and *parole* - *la langue* being the 'system of a language, the language as a system of forms, whereas *parole* is actual speech, the speech acts which are made possible by the language'⁴. If the signs in his system, words - made up of both the concept they signalled and the sounds they consisted of - were arbitrary on both counts, they could only be perceived as having meaning because of their place within the system of language. The historical evolution of each word could therefore provide no clue to its structural positioning; its 'meaning', as it were. *Langue* is therefore the correct object of study for theoretical linguists (and, by extension, semiologists), and the synchronic approach is the only way in which to isolate their particular objects of study.

In the case of a literary study like this, however, the factors - and data - become more complex. The ideological system of 'representations of South America' is obviously linked to a real place, South America (just as words define, as often as not, actual objects within the world) - but this is more a practical than a theoretical difficulty. If we bear in mind that the focus of our study is versions of 'South America' written from the outside - rather than its own history or indigenous literature (except insofar as they assist us in defining what is specific to

⁴Jonathan Culler, *Saussure*, Fontana Modern Masters (Glasgow, 1979), p.29.

this external view) - then we see that these three areas of study (reality, textuality, and Latin American literature) in fact complement one another. The real problem, then, is positioning the data at our disposal. If two important texts were published a century apart (like Montaigne's 'Des Cannibales' and Behn's *Oroonoko*), what is our justification for assuming that they form part of the same synchronic constellation, given that that is determined by a single section cut across the diachronic line? What is more, while laws of syntax and grammar can easily be subsumed under *langue*, leaving actual utterances produced by a speaker of that language to be described as *parole*, how are we to distinguish the two when our *parole* consists of texts by Montaigne and Columbus, and our *langue* of complex - and never fully consistent - generalizations deduced from them?

My answer to these problems must be a pragmatic one. The methods of 'strategic location' and 'strategic formation' used by Edward Said in *Orientalism* to place texts within a particular tradition of authority have already been discussed in the General Preface. The first (defined by Said as 'a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the ... material he writes about') was identified by me with each author's relationship to the mythologies of South America discussed in the last chapter. The second ('a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large'⁵) I equated with the relationship between a work and its cultural and generic context. Given that the text at the centre of this chapter, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, was published in 1688, it is clear that our 'synchronic section' should concern the system of influences working upon her in that year. Books, however, like words, do not simply come into existence at a particular moment. In English, for example, words from different eras (the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Norman invasions, for example) all operate together without much distinction at any given time. Columbus's *Journal* was not physically available to Aphra Behn, but a number of subsequent works reflecting the general insights of the 'discoverer' (including Montaigne's essays) certainly were. It seems not too unreasonable, accordingly, to see discussion of the

⁵Said, p.20.

implications of these texts as a necessary adjunct to any truthful account of how Aphra Behn reacted to these conventions of representation. I therefore allow myself a larger synchronic section than would be desirable in the case of a sign-system like a language, simply because I see no other way of gathering a sufficiently representative sample from which to deduce the laws of langue which inform - and are, perhaps, subverted by - the example of parole quoted in each chapter. 'Strategic location' denotes the process by which I place Aphra Behn against the set of conventions established by (among others) Columbus and Montaigne. 'Strategic formation' acts, then, almost as a control - an account of how each work obeys the constraints of its particular function (Romance, Journal, Travel account, Critical essay) in order to define its particular version of 'South America'.

2.2 Synchronic Section

2.2.1 Columbus

Let us begin again, then, with our image of 'Columbus on the beach'. He himself wrote of the original version of this scene:

<<Yo ..., porque nos tuviesen mucha amistad, porque conocí que era gente que mejor se libraria y convertiria á nuestra Santa Fé con amor que no por fuerza, les di á algunos de ellos unos bonetes colorados y unas cuentas de vidrios, que se ponian al pescuezo, y otras cosas muchas de poco valor, con que hobieron mucho placer y quedaron tanto nuestros que era maravilla.⁶

This image of a conqueror metaphorically handing out the 'cap and bells' accords very much with the first version of the scene outlined in Section 1 above. He was, however, impressed by their appearance:

Ellos andan todos desnudos como su madre los parió, y tambien las mugeres, aunque no vide mas de una, farto moza, y todos los que yo vi eran todos mancebos, que ninguno vide de edad de mas de treinta años, muy bien hechos, de muy fermosos cuerpos y muy buenas caras ... dellos se pintan de prieto, y ellos son de la color de los canarios, ni negros ni blancos⁷.

Having painted this idyllic picture, he proceeds to spoil it:

Ellos deben ser buenos servidores y de buen ingenio, que veo que muy presto dicen todo lo que les decia, y creo que ligeramente se harian cristianos, que me pareció que ninguna secta tenian.⁸

⁶Viajes de Cristóbal Colón, con una carta, edited by M. Fernández de Navarrete (Madrid, 1941), p.19: "I, ... that we might form great friendship, for I knew that they were a people who could be more easily freed and converted to our holy faith by love than by force, gave to some of them red caps, and glass beads to put round their necks, and many other things of little value, which gave them great pleasure, and made them so much our friends that it was a marvel to see." (translations quoted from Columbus, Journal - page numbers thus (37)).

⁷Colón, Viajes, pp.19-20: 'They go as naked as when their mothers bore them, and so do the women, although I did not see more than one young girl. All I saw were youths, none more than thirty years of age. They are very well made, with very handsome bodies, and very good countenances ... They paint themselves black, and they are the colour of the Canarians, neither black nor white.' (38).

⁸Colón, Viajes, p.20: 'They should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no religion.' (38).

This first encounter contains in embryo many of the major themes which would define the intellectual system of the first explorers - the nakedness and humility of the people (witness their contentment with 'cosas ... de poco valor'); their physical attractiveness and the freedom of their lives (they have 'ninguna secta'); and finally the duplicity of the Europeans faced with such innocence (Columbus plans to 'free' them by making them servants).

The appeal of this scene is more devious than that, though, as we will find if we compare it with subsequent 'close encounters'. The nakedness and innocence of these people makes them both erotically and theologically stirring. Columbus notes that 'no vida mas de una, farto moza' as if he were looking for such 'young girls' (not surprisingly, under the circumstances), but one of the first accounts of Brazil enlarges on this aspect of their appeal more unequivocally, talking of a girl who was:

all dyed from head to foot in that [black] paint; and indeed she was so well built and so well curved, and her privy part (what a one she had!) was so gracious that many women of our country, on seeing such charms, would be ashamed that theirs were not like hers⁹.

What is more, he makes it clear that seeing this nudity inspires him with reflections unfavourable to the women back home. In the rather differently intended words of Joseph Brodsky: 'the discovery of the New World ... gave pensive men of the time a chance to look upon themselves and the nation as though from outside'¹⁰. Their colour ('ni negros ni blancos', as Columbus puts it) also helps, since to covet the black by nature would presumably be a perverse, 'African' desire.

Their theological importance is inextricably bound up with the titillation of this innocent nakedness. As Brodsky puts it:

The appeal the concept of the 'noble savage' enjoyed among the literati and, subsequently, with the rest of society had clearly to do

⁹Quoted by John Hemming, Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians (London, 1978), p.4.

¹⁰Joseph Brodsky, Less Than One: Selected Essays (Harmondsworth, 1987), p.79.

with a very vulgar public notion of paradise ... It was simply based on the notion that Adam, too, was naked, as well as on the rejection of Original Sin¹¹.

Clothes are a consequence of the Fall (the 'shame' felt by Adam and Eve after their disobedience). Therefore not to wear clothes is a blessing to which sinful humans cannot aspire until they reach their final pardon or condemnation - in the one case, to emphasize forgiveness; in the other, to strip off the mask from sin. Columbus's naked natives are therefore either reminders of the bliss before the Fall - or wicked and ignorant savages who are unaware of their own degradation (and whose own theological status is presumably as low as a beast's by consequence).

To continue with Columbus, there are two other important points to make about his initial encounter with the natives. The first is his obsessive interest in a very trivial aspect of their attire:

yo estaba atento y trabajaba de saber si había oro, y vide que algunos dellos traian un pedazuelo colgado en un agujero que tienen á la nariz, y por señas pude entender que yendo al Sur ó volviendo la isla por el Sur que estaba allí un rey que tenia grandes vasos dello, y tenia muy mucho. Trabajé que fuesen allá, y despues vide que no entendian en la ida.¹²

They prove unable to fathom this peculiarly European fixation, and show 'no inclination' to drop everything in its service. Columbus, however, continues to question diligently each group of natives he meets about the source of this substance.

The second point to note is the apparent tendency of the natives to regard the newcomers as gods (as in the first of the scenes in Section 1 above):

entendiamos que nos preguntaban si eramos venidos del cielo; y

¹¹Brodsky, p.334.

¹²Colón, *Viajes*, p.21: 'I was attentive, and took trouble to ascertain if there was gold. I saw that some of them had a small piece fastened in a hole they have in the nose, and by signs I was able to make out that to the south, or going from the island to the south, there was a king who had great cups full, and who possessed a great quantity. I tried to get them to go there, but afterwards I saw that they had no inclination.' (39).

vino uno viejo en el batel dentro, y otros a voces grandes llamaban todos, hombres y mugeres: venid á ver los hombres que vinieron del cielo; traedles de comer y de beber. Vinieron muchos y muchas mugeres, cada uno con algo, dando gracias a Dios, echándose al suelo, y levantaban las manos al cielo, y despues a voces nos llamaban que fuésemos á tierra¹³.

It can never be otherwise than flattering to be taken for a god, and this motif has therefore always been emphasized by European writers. By the principles of doublethink (which is perhaps the most accurate analogy for the processes of any pervasive ideology), this 'error' of the natives proves simultaneously their gullibility (and therefore their unfitness to rule themselves, or their souls), and their good taste ('if they take us for gods, that proves that we must be god-like - just as we always suspected'). It is not, therefore, an entirely innocent emphasis on the part of these discoverers and explorers. Nor is it really naivety that leads Columbus to exclaim:

siempre están de propósito que vengo del cielo, por mucha conversación que ayan avido conmigo¹⁴.

Having looked at the parameters of this scene, we should be able to extrapolate some more general principles.

The first point to be made is the tendency, from the beginning, to see the 'New World' in terms of some pre-existing intellectual system. Not that this is a novel point, but its precise workings in this case are surprising. Columbus shows considerable scepticism in his treatment of the stories told him by the natives:

Toda la gente que hasta hoy ha hallado diz que tiene grandísimo temor de los de Caniba ó Canima, y dicen que viven en esta isla de

¹³Colón, *Viajes*, p.22: 'We understood that they asked us if we had come from heaven. One old man came into the boat, and others cried out, in loud voices, to all the men and women, to come and see the men who had come from heaven, and to bring them to eat and drink. Many came, including women, each bringing something, giving thanks to God, throwing themselves on the ground and shouting to us to come on shore.' (41).

¹⁴*Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus*, translated and edited by Cecil Jane, Hakluyt Society, second series, 65 & 70, 2 vols (London, 1930-33), I, pp.10-11: 'they are always assured that I come from Heaven, for all the intercourse which they have had with me'.

Bohio, ... y cree que van á tomar á aquellos á sus tierras y casas, como sean muy cobardes y no saber de armas ... decian que no tenian sino un ojo y la cara de perro, y creia el Almirante que mentian, y sentia el Almirante que debian de ser del señorío del Gran Can que los captivaban.¹⁵

Also:

De esta gente diz que los de *Cuba* ó *Juana*, y de todas esotras islas tienen gran miedo, porque diz que comian los hombres. Otras cosas le contaban los dichos indios, por señas, muy maravillosas; mas el Almirante no diz que las creia, sino que debian tener mas astucia y mejor ingenio los de aquella isla *Bohio* para los captivar quellos, porque eran muy flacos de corazon.¹⁶

We can see in these two quotations Columbus's two principal sources of information displayed¹⁷. One is the sailing instructions given him by the Florentine astronomer Paolo Toscanelli in 1474, which detail the western route to the Indies, and the wonders to be found there, mainly from the account given by Marco Polo two centuries before (hence the reference to the 'Gran Can'). We see, thus, that Columbus has a textual justification for setting aside the stories of those who just happen to live there - and this also explains his equation of 'Cuba' with 'Cipango' (Japan), and 'Caniba' with 'Gran Can'¹⁸.

¹⁵Colón, *Viajes*, pp.60-61: 'The Admiral says that all the people he has hitherto met have very great fear of those of *Caniba* or *Canima*. They affirm that they live in the island of *Bohio* ... The Admiral understood that those of Caniba come to take people from their homes, they being very cowardly, and without knowledge of arms ... They declared that the Canibas had only one eye and dogs' faces. The Admiral thought they lied, and was inclined to believe that it was people from the dominions of the Gran Can who took them into captivity.' (87).

¹⁶Colón, *Viajes*, pp.69-70: 'The Admiral says that the inhabitants of Cuba, or Juana, and of all the other islands, are much afraid of the inhabitants of Bohio, because they say that they eat people. The Indians relate other things, by signs, which are very wonderful; but the Admiral did not believe them. He only inferred that those of Bohio must have more cleverness and cunning to be able to capture the others, who, however, are very poor-spirited.' (98).

¹⁷It must be specified that the peculiar processes of textual transmission in the case of the *Journal*, which survives only in the form of an abstract prepared for his own purposes by the Conquest's bitterest critic, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, mean that only some of the entries are attributed verbatim to Columbus by the editor. In this case, for example, it is Las Casas who summarizes 'el Almirante's' reflections in the third person, rather than some self-aggrandizing bent of Columbus's.

¹⁸Colón, *Viajes*, pp.34 & 76.

His other criterion of evaluation is common sense. The stories of the 'Caniba', or Caribs (or cannibals) are obviously implausible, and can therefore be set aside by a European intellect. It is tempting to despise this ready dismissal of what in fact turned out to be the case - the existence of cannibals - but it is difficult to see how else a man like Columbus could have acted when faced with stories of 'hombres de un ojo, y otros con hocicos de perros, que comian los hombres'¹⁹. Unconditional acceptance, or judicious 'interpretation' were the alternatives - and twenty years of trying to convince European monarchs to send a fleet westwards to the Indies may not have accustomed Columbus to accepting received opinion.

In any case, as we have remarked before, what is wholly new is wholly meaningless. It must be interpreted in terms of what one already knows in order to make sense. Columbus was thus engaged in setting up a textual system the moment he began to rationalize his view of the natives. By the same token, the natives too can be observed employing similar means of interpretation.

Despues, á la tarde, vino el Rey á la nao; el Almirante le hizo la honra que debia, y le hizo decir cómo era de los Reyes de Castilla, los cuales eran los mayores Príncipes del mundo. Mas ni los indios quel Almirante traia, que eran los intérpretes, creian nada, ni el Rey tampoco, sino creian que venian del cielo, y que los reinos de los Reyes de Castilla eran en el cielo, y no en este mundo.²⁰

Again, this seems a reasonable hypothesis on the Indians' part - making sense of an entirely unforeseen invasion in terms of religion. (That is, assuming that the incident was not simply invented in order to flatter 'los Reyes de Castilla', as in Raleigh's account of the native reaction to a picture of Queen Elizabeth). The same process can, however, be observed in the first accounts of the Conquest of

¹⁹Colón, *Viajes*, p.44: 'men with one eye, and others with dogs' noses who were cannibals'. (68).

²⁰Colón, *Viajes*, p.82: 'In the afternoon the king came on board the ship, where the Admiral received him in due form, and caused him to be told that the ships belonged to the Sovereigns of Castille, who were the greatest Princes in the world. But neither the Indians who were on board, who acted as interpreters, nor the king, believed a word of it. They maintained that the Spaniards came from heaven, and that the Sovereigns of Castille must be in heaven, and not in this world.' (114).

Mexico:

Y lo más cierto era, según entendimos, que les habían dicho sus antepasados que habían de venir gentes de hacia donde sale el sol, con barbas, que los habían de señorear. Agora sea por lo uno o por lo otro, estaban en posta y vela muchos indios del gran Montezuma en aquel río²¹.

Unfortunately, it is clear that what these methods of reading have in common is a tendency to make their proponents see what they expect to see. The Indians have apparently been conditioned to expect gods from afar, and accordingly that is what they encounter ('por mucha conversación que ayán avido conmigo', as Columbus puts it). Columbus, on the other hand, trained in a more arrogant ethnocentric tradition, is prepared to decry the Indians he meets as timid and unaggressive on the flimsiest evidence:

y certifica el Almirante a los Reyes que 10 hombres hagan huir a 10.000: tan cobardes y madrosos son²².

This belief almost leads him to grief on more than one occasion (and led him to sacrifice the lives of thirty-nine of his men, whom he left as a 'garrison' on Hispaniola). On the very same day that he wrote the entry quoted above his interpretation proved false:

uno dellos se adelantó en el río junto con la popa de la barca, y hizo una grande plática, quel Almirante no entendia, salvo que los otros indios de cuando en cuando alzaban las manos al cielo y daban una grande voz. Pensaba el Almirante que lo aseguraban y que les placia de su venida; pero vido al indio que consigo traia demudarse la cara, y amarillo como la cera temblaba mucho, diciendo por señas quel Almirante se fuese fuera del río, que los

²¹Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España, edited by Carlos Pereyra, 2 vols (Madrid, 1942), I, 43: 'Now it is a fact, as we afterwards heard, that the Indians' ancestors had prophesied that men with beards would come from the direction of the sunrise and rule over them. So, for one reason or another, many of the great Montezuma's people were posted beside that river, watching for us'. (translations quoted from Bernal Díaz, The Conquest of New Spain, translated by J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1974) - page numbers thus (35)).

²²Colón, Viajes, p.67: 'The Admiral assures the Sovereigns that ten thousand of these men would run from ten, so cowardly and timid are they.' (95).

The second important point to make about our schematic picture of 'Columbus on the beach' is the nature of Columbus's influence in this period. For example, while his claim that he had reached Japan and China was soon dismissed - his equally 'textual' belief that the Earthly Paradise was located somewhere in the hinterland of the Orinoco was far more influential:

creo que pueda salir de allí esa agua, bien que sea lexos y venga á parar allí donde yo vengo, y faga este lago. grandes indiçios son estos del parayso terrenal, porqu'el sitio es conforme á la opinión d'estos sanctos y sanos theólogos.²⁴

This adoption of the paradigms of Biblical and classical authority to 'explain' new features of the landscape became the dominant mode throughout the period of the discovery. More important than this for our purposes, though, was the extent to which Columbus became an emblematic figure in his own right. His action in taking captive a native who came to plead for the release of his wife and three children (hostages for the Indians' good behaviour), is denounced by Las Casas as:

a breach of the law of nations, which is not excused by the Admiral's good intentions; for it is never right to do evil that good may come of it ... on account of this act alone ... he well merited all the sorrows and misfortunes which he suffered during the rest of his life.²⁵

All of Columbus's sufferings in jail and exile were thus seen as justified by one evil deed, according to this reading (similarly with Cortés, robbed of the fruits of

²³Colón, *Viajes*, pp.67-68: 'One of the natives advanced into the river near the stern of the boat, and made a long speech, which the Admiral did not understand. At intervals the other Indians raised their hands to heaven, and shouted. The Admiral thought he was assuring him that he was pleased at his arrival; but he saw the Indian who came from the ship change the colour of his face, and turn as yellow as wax, trembling much, and letting the Admiral know by signs that he should leave the river, as they were going to kill him.' (95).

²⁴Columbus, *Select Documents*, II, pp.38-39: 'I believe that this water may originate from there, though it be far away and may come to collect there where I came and may form this lake. These are great indications of the earthly paradise, for the situation agrees with the opinion of those holy and wise theologians'.

²⁵quoted by Markham, in Columbus, *Journal*, p.75.

his labours by bureaucrats - or Pizarro, killed in the faction fights between the Conquistadors). One might see these as classical *exempla* - like Belisarius begging his bread on the streets; or Croesus punished for presumption in declaring himself happy - but they are somewhat more. They represent a determinedly metaphysical approach to the dilemma of finding a world where no world was meant to be. How could the fates of its conquerors not share something of that New World's nature as (potential) heaven or hell? We can thus see the two different versions of the beach scene as contrasting emphases of the same essential pattern - in the one, Columbus is arrogant, a conquering god; in the other, a 'man of sorrows', having suffered in crossing the ocean, and prepared to suffer more.

We shall have more to say of this later, when discussing Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, but for the moment, the implications of the natives on the beach may be expressed in a simple, four-cornered paradigm:

EUROPEAN as god	INDIAN as dupe
EUROPEAN as despoiler	INDIAN as innocent

Taking the Europeans as gods makes the Indians seem 1/ Idolatrous: unable to distinguish between man on earth and God in Heaven; 2/ Foolish: like children who have to be thwarted for their own good. If, however (as Las Casas was the first to contend, in his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552)), the Europeans were in fact mere despoilers, the Indians become both innocent and dignified.

In fact, though, the two positions are not so diametrically opposed as they might seem. They embody some constants. For example, the Indians are consistently child-like and innocent - whether that gave Europeans a right to lord it over them or not. The Europeans are always powerful, dominant, and 'adult' - whether using their power to do evil or good.

Our paradigm, then, to some extent explains how both of these attitudes to the Indians can subsist in the same work without being perceived by its author as contradictory. In Columbus, the Indians are said to be 'muy simplices y muy lindos cuerpos de hombre'²⁶, 'la mejor gente del mundo'²⁷, which makes them 'buenos para les mandar y les hacer trabajar, sembrar, y hacer todo lo otro que fuere menester, y que hagan villas'²⁸.

²⁶Colón, Viajes, p.23: 'very simple-minded and handsomely-formed people.' (42).

²⁷Colón, Viajes, p.81: 'the best people in the world'. (112).

²⁸Colón, Viajes, p.83: 'to be ordered about, to work and sow, and do all that may be necessary, and to build towns'. (114).

2.2.2 Montaigne

In general terms, there seem to be two reactions to this paradigm of South America among contemporary writers. One is what might be called the 'aesthetic' response - revelling in the sheer imaginative possibilities of an Edenic landscape. The other is more analytical, and involves attempting to reconcile the European (or, rather, Renaissance) system of ideas with the observations made in America. Michel de Montaigne is the most famous example of the latter tendency, and I therefore propose to devote some time to the implications of his essay 'Des Cannibales' (already mentioned in Chapter One) before going on to examine the treatment of landscape in Columbus and Bernal Díaz. A few exemplary quotations should suffice for this purpose:

Or je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage; comme de vray, il semble que nous n'avons autre mire de la verité et de la raison que l'exemple et idée des opinions et usances du pais où nous sommes. Là est tousjours la parfaite religion, la parfaite police, perfect et accomply usage de toutes choses. Ils sont sauvages, de mesme que nous appellons sauvages les fruicts que nature, de soy et de son progrez ordinaire, a produits: là où, à la verité, ce sont ceux que nous avons alterez par nostre artifice et detournez de l'ordre commun, que nous devrions appeller plutost sauvages.²⁹

Montaigne's information is entirely at second-hand, as he admits - but since his intellectual method works by imposition rather than empirical deduction, this causes him little trouble. His real intention is to criticize contemporary Europe through the agency of the 'golden age' savages of America, and what would

²⁹ Montaigne, *Oeuvres Complètes*, edited by Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1967), pp.200-13 (p.203): 'Now, to return to my argument, I do not believe, from what I have been told about this people, that there is anything barbarous or savage about them, except that we all call barbarous anything that is contrary to our own habits. Indeed we seem to have no other criterion of truth and reason than the type and kind of opinions current in the land where we live. There we see always the perfect religion, the perfect political system, the perfect and most accomplished way of doing everything. These people are wild in the same way as we say that fruits are wild, when nature has produced them by herself and in her ordinary way; whereas, in fact, it is those that we have artificially modified, and removed from the common order, that we ought to call wild.' (translations quoted from Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, translated by J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1985) - page numbers thus (108-9)).



normally be perceived as an obstacle to this view, their status as cannibals, he turns into a point in their favour:

Je ne suis pas marry que nous remerquons l'horreur barbaresque qu'il y a en une telle action, mais ouy bien dequoy, jugeans bien de leurs fautes, nous soyons si aveuglez aux nostres. Je pense qu'il y a plus de barbarie à manger un homme vivant qu'à le manger mort, à deschirer par tourmens et par geénes un corps encore plein de sentiment ... que de le rostir et manger après qu'il est trespasé.³⁰

Montaigne, of course, is in a long tradition of satirists who used other, theoretically 'ideal' societies to point out the faults of their own (Tacitus's *Germania*, and Virgil's *Georgics*, Book II are cases in point) - and he acknowledges this by using quotations from the Classics as his 'authority' for denouncing Christian Europe - but his real importance is almost inadvertent. He intended to show the weakness of our case if we sought to criticize others for 'barbarism' - however, the picture he drew of the Indians (whether drawn from published sources, as some commentators believe, or obtained, as he claims, first-hand from a house-guest) was so alluring as to support an image of them as pure innocents. 'Earthly Paradise' mythology, the connotations of nakedness, sexual liberty (as John Hemming puts it, 'an adolescent's dream world [of] carefree single women'³¹) - all worked, as we have seen, as much in the Indians' disfavour as in their favour; and Montaigne, with his eulogy of a Platonic golden age, had succeeded in fostering the very notions he sought to defuse. His attempts to quash an ethnocentric myth of superiority had, paradoxically, reinforced an eschatological one.

Montaigne, then, could be said to straddle two traditions - one exemplified by the stern and denunciatory Las Casas, with his belief in the absolute evil of the

³⁰Montaigne, pp.207-08: 'I am not so anxious that we should note the horrible savagery of these acts as concerned that, whilst judging their faults so correctly, we should be so blind to our own. I consider it more barbarous to eat a man alive than to eat him dead, to tear by rack and torture a body still full of feeling ... than to roast and eat a man after he is dead.' (113).

³¹Hemming, p.17.

colonists; The other best summed up as the 'landscape' tradition: the sensuous (and nostalgic, since it was constantly being eroded) appreciation of the beauty of the New World and its inhabitants.

Columbus is the first great exponent of this mode of response:

Ella es isla muy verde y llana y fertilísima, y no pongo duda que todo el año siembran panizo y cogen, y así todas otras cosas; y vide muchos árboles muy disformes de los nuestros, y dellos que tenían los ramos de muchas maneras y todo en un pie, y un ramito es de una manera y otro de otra, y tan disforme que es la mayor maravilla del mundo cuánta es la diversidad de la una manera á la otra, verbi gracia: ... ni estos son enjeridos, porque se pueda decir que el enjerto lo hace, antes son por los montes, ni cura dellos esta gente ... Aquí son los peces tan disformes de los nuestros qués maravilla. Hay algunos hechos como gallos de las mas finas colores del mundo, azules, amarillos, colorados y de todas colores, y otros pintados de mil maneres; y las colores son tan finas que no hay hombre que no se maraville y no tome gran descanso á verlos.³²

The points, then, that Columbus emphasizes are: the country's fertility, the fact that one can harvest all year round; the country's wildness, the fact that 'grafting is unknown' and that the trees grow spontaneously in the shapes preferred by art; the country's diversity, the fact that the fish come in all the primary colours ('and other tints' besides), and that this is something that would cause wonder and delight ('maravilla') to any man.

In essence, then, he is describing a landscape which is different from that of Europe - but different in very patterned ways. It does all the things that a landscape can, but more so. It is continuously fertile, endlessly various, and yet

³²Colón, *Viajes*, p.27: 'It is a very green island, level and very fertile, and I have no doubt that they sow and gather corn all the year round, as well as other things. I saw many trees very unlike those of our country. Many of them have their branches growing in different ways and all from one trunk, and one twig is one form, and another in a different shape, and so unlike that it is the greatest wonder in the world to see the great diversity ... Nor are these grafted, for it may be said that grafting is unknown, the trees being wild, and untended by these people ... Here the fish are so unlike ours that it is wonderful. Some are the shape of dories, and of the finest colours in the world, blue, yellow, red, and other tints, all painted in various ways, and the colours are so bright that there is not a man who would not be astonished, and would not take great delight in seeing them.' (47).

absolutely wild - untended except by the hand of God. The influence of this 'garden' description can be seen to extend to Aphra Behn as well, in her account (quoted in Chapter One above) of the diversely-coloured trees in Guiana:

some are all White, some Purple, some Scarlet, some Blue, some Yellow; bearing at the same Time ripe Fruit, and blooming young, or producing every Day new.³³

Nor is it perhaps superfluous to remark here that the main reason why Alexander von Humboldt, chief exponent of the idealist conception of American history, was prepared to herald Columbus as the 'discoverer' is because: 'Columbus was sensitive to the beauty of tropical nature, which enabled him to announce the existence of a truly new world'³⁴.

Humboldt went on to claim that 'in spite of his crude expression, he rose above Camoëns and other poets of his day, who were still anchored to the literary fiction of an imaginary artificial arcadian Nature'. Certainly there are some distinctions to be made here, but it is difficult to agree with Humboldt that the conventions of Pastoral landscape description did not influence Columbus almost as much as his poetic contemporaries. He says, a little further on:

En este tiempo anduve así por aquellos árboles, que era la cosa mas hermosa de ver que otra que se haya visto, veyendo tanta verdura en tanto grado como en el mes de Mayo en el Andalucía, y los árboles todos estan tan disformes de los nuestros como el día de la noche; y así las frutas, y así las yerbas y las piedras y todas las cosas. Verdad es que algunos árboles eran de la naturaleza de otros que hay en Castilla, por ende había una gran diferencia, y los otros árboles de otras maneras eran tantos que no hay persona que lo pueda decir ni asemejar á otros de Castilla.³⁵

The comparison of what he saw to his experience of May in Andalucía - the most 'tropical' part of Europe - emphasizes the point. 'Everything' is different from

³³Behn, V, 178.

³⁴O'Gorman, p.32.

³⁵Colón. *Viajes*, pp.28-29: 'During that time I walked among the trees, which was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, beholding as much verdure as in the month of May in Andalusia. The trees are as unlike ours as night from day, as are the fruits, the herbs, the stones, and everything. It is true that some of the trees bore some resemblance to those in Castille, but most of them are very different, and some were so unlike that no one could compare them to anything in Castille.' (49).

Europe, but everything is categorized as an ideal version of its European counterpart. As in Pastoral, pests and predators have been de-emphasized and pushed to the periphery of the picture; but, also, the forms of the seasons, and the plants, and the stones, have been changed and made more various and delightful.

Columbus, in finding a verbal equivalent for his delight in the scenery, is forced back on two complementary textual modes. One, as we have seen, is the language of Pastoral (Virgil, or Longus, or Sannazaro); the other is the language of Millennial discourse (exemplified in the descriptions of paradise in the Middle English *Pearl*). Whether he wishes to or not, he cannot convey a sense of what he has seen to other people's minds except by employing these recognized paradigms. A similar dilemma is signalled in Bernal Díaz's description of his first sight of Tenochtitlán, the city of the Aztecs:

Y desdeque vimos tantas ciudades y villas pobladas en el agua, y en tierra firme otras grandes poblaciones, y aquella calzada tan derecha y por nivel cómo iba a Méjico, nos quedamos admirados, y decíamos que parecía a las cosas de encantamiento que cuentan en el libro de Amadís, por las grandes torres y cues y edificios que tenían dentro en el agua, y todos de calicanto, y aun algunos de nuestros soldados decían que si aquello que vían, si era entre sueños³⁶.

We have seen, then, the relentlessly textualizing and interpretative spirit in which these first interpreters of South America approached their task. Not much has been made of the distinction of genres between Columbus's *Journal* - with its dual purpose of providing a record of events and a set of suggestions for the possible commercial exploitation of his discoveries - and that of Bernal Díaz's history. Or, for that matter, between the genre of the 'essay', recently invented by Montaigne, and that of the 'novel' - not really far developed beyond classical models like *Daphnis and Chloe* - as exemplified in *Oroonoko*. The way in which

³⁶Bernal Díaz, I, pp.297-98: 'And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns and cues and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream.' (214).

they have been discussed, too: going from Columbus to Las Casas to Montaigne, may have given the impression of a rhetorical evolution apparent in historical terms. It remains for me to say, then, that while such precisions can and perhaps should be made, that has not been the purpose of these introductory sections. Any sense of ideological 'progress' from Montaigne to Behn would be one of which I was extremely suspicious; but I do feel that it is legitimate to lay out a 'synchronic section' of texts in this schematic fashion in order to provide a sense of the paradigms which governed an undoubtedly differently motivated work by Aphra Behn.

2.3 Oroonoko

2.3.1 Conventional Elements

When Behn published her novel *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave* in 1688 (shortly after the upsurge of interest in American subjects which had been started by Dryden's *Indian Emperor* (1665), D'avenant's *Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* (1685), and Sir Robert Howard's collaborative *The Indian Queen* (1665)), the principal way in which her work was distinguished from theirs stemmed from her claim to have spent her childhood in South America - in Surinam (then a British colony). She could therefore claim to be presenting authentic experience, untinctured by fictional invention:

the History of this *ROYAL SLAVE* ... shall come simply into the World, recommended by its own proper Merits, and natural Intrigues; there being enough of Reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the Addition of Invention.³⁷

I shall have more to say about this claim of hers later, but for the moment let us note the effect which it has upon the implied authority of her work. Behn's work is no less a fiction than the novels of Daniel Defoe, which similarly supplied a 'factual' genealogy of autobiographical witness for the events recounted. Merely claiming to be an account of 'Reality' rather than the product of 'Invention' is enough, however, to align her statements with the (alleged) objectivity of Columbus and his commentators Las Casas and Montaigne. Her work is shaped according to the dictates of fiction, but it claims (whether rightly or wrongly) to be the result of experiences she had had. Since this is more or less the state of affairs already detected by us in these other 'textualizers' of South America, it would therefore seem appropriate to examine some of the features in her work which run parallel to theirs.

Her description of the country, in the first few pages of the novel, begins with an account of the Indians, whom she characterizes as:

Gods of the Rivers, or Fellow-Citizens of the Deep; so rare an Art they have in swimming, diving, and almost living in Water; by

³⁷ Behn, V, 129.

which they command the less swift Inhabitants of the Floods.³⁸

This rather curious metaphor, recalling Columbus's wonder at the multi-coloured dories, at least explains the habitual mode of dress of the Natives, with whom 'we trade for Feathers, which they order into all Shapes', and 'Beads of all Colours'³⁹.

The Beads they weave into Aprons about a Quarter of an Ell long,
and of the same Breadth; working them very prettily in Flowers of
several Colours; which Apron they wear just before 'em, as *Adam*
and *Eve* did the Fig-leaves⁴⁰.

Aphra Behn has negotiated herself very cunningly around the nakedness of the Indians. They swim a lot, and almost 'live' in the water - and therefore wear next to nothing - but on land they adopt aprons, after the manner of Adam and Eve after the Fall. To avoid any more unequivocal sense of 'paradise lost', however, she emphasizes that the materials of the aprons are sold to them by the Europeans. They may or may not have been perfect in their natural state - but, in any case, now they have to accommodate themselves to our ways.

The other, erotic implication of nudity is not ignored by Behn either, though she weaves her way around it, again, in a most original way.

tho' they are all thus naked, if one lives for ever among 'em, there
[is] not to be seen an indecent Action, or Glance: and being
continually us'd to see one another so unadorn'd, so like our first
Parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no Wishes, there
being nothing to heighten Curiosity: but all you can see, you see at
once, and every Moment see; and where there is no Novelty, there
can be no Curiosity.⁴¹

There is a certain dignity in this refusal to take refuge in innuendo. Her Indians are naked and unashamed; but this is the result of custom, not of any exceptional passivity or lack of feeling, for, as she says:

Not but I have seen a handsome young *Indian*, dying for Love of a
very beautiful young *Indian* Maid; but all his Courtship was, to

³⁸Behn, V, 133.

³⁹Behn, V, 130.

⁴⁰Behn, V, 130.

⁴¹Behn, V, 131.

fold his Arms, pursue her with his Eyes, and Sighs were all his Language⁴².

It is, of course, as much of an artifice as the thinly veiled voyeurism of Columbus or Caminha - only in this case the model has been transferred to the language of the cult of sensibility (with which Behn was well acquainted, having herself written three volumes of *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1683-84), full of high-minded sentiments).

A more significant parallel with these predecessors is her version of the Indian/European paradigm described in Section 2 above. Her Indians are innocent:

these People represented to me an absolute *Idea* of the first State of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin: And 'tis most evident and plain, that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous Mistress.⁴³

Her Europeans are full of duplicity:

they being on all Occasions very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress 'em as Friends, and not to treat 'em as Slaves; nor dare we do otherwise, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that Continent.⁴⁴

By the same token, her Indians are foolish and easily duped into regarding their visitors as gods:

I soon perceiv'd, by an Admiration that is natural to these People, and by the extreme Ignorance and simplicity of 'em, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant Religion among them, and to oppose any Notions or Fictions upon 'em. For seeing a Kinsman of mine set some Paper on Fire with a Burning-Glass, a Trick they had never before seen, they were like to have ador'd him for a God⁴⁵.

However sincere her admiration for the state of innocence, one cannot help seeing

⁴²Behn, V, 131.

⁴³Behn, V, 131.

⁴⁴Behn, V, 133.

⁴⁵Behn, V, 186.

that Behn - like her contemporaries - also regards it with a little contempt. In short, she is the very type of the 'double' European - like the Governor who gave the Indians his word to come on a particular day; and, when he failed to do so, was mourned for by them:

And when they saw he was not dead, they ask'd him what Name they had for a Man who promis'd a Thing he did not do? The Governor told them, Such a Man was a *Lyar*, which was a Word of Infamy to a Gentleman. Then one of 'em reply'd, *Governor, you are a Lyar, and guilty of that Infamy.*⁴⁶

The simple moral of this story is complicated by the fact that Behn herself is capable of telling it with apparent approval, while contradicting it with her own attitude not only towards the Indians - but towards Oroonoko, the 'Royal Slave' hero of the novel, whom she deceives as a result of thinking him a danger to the community, despite her sympathy for his position: 'After this [his confession to her 'in whom he had an entire Confidence'], I neither thought it convenient to trust him much out of our View, nor did the Country, who fear'd him'⁴⁷.

Having observed in her the duplicity of the European, it remains to be seen How Behn's fiction accomodates itself to the 'aesthetic'/'analytical' divide analyzed above.

Like Montaigne, she has theories about the Indians' displays of valour:

when any War was waging, two Men ... are ask'd, What they dare do, to shew they are worthy to lead an Army? When he who is first ask'd, making no Reply, cuts off his Nose, and throws it corntemptibly on the Ground; and the other does something to himself that he thinks surpasses him, and perhaps deprives himself of Lips and an Eye: So they slash on 'till one gives out, and many have dy'd in this Debate.⁴⁸

Unlike him, however, she has no larger scheme to set it in. Hers is, essentially, the art of an impressionist - rendering a landscape and supplying each part of it with the appropriate emotion (in this case, horror; but also black humour).

⁴⁶Behn, V, 132.

⁴⁷Behn, V, 177.

⁴⁸Behn, V, 188.

Her descriptions of the country have a tendency, as a result, to become a kind of catalogue of 'Excellencies':

little *Paraketoës*, great *Parrots*, *Muckaws*, and a thousand other Birds and Beasts of wonderful and surprizing Forms, Shapes and Colours ... prodigious Snakes, of which there are some three-score Yards in Length; as is the Skin of one that may be seen at his Majesty's *Antiquary's*; where are also some rare Flies, of amazing Forms and Colours, presented to 'em by myself; some as big as my Fist, some less; and all of various Excellencies, such as Art cannot imitate.⁴⁹

Like Defoe's after her, Behn's fiction depends on an appearance of veracity - and the melodrama of her plot, while admirable in itself, seems sometimes just an excuse to present strange landscapes and vistas to her readers (for example, the three expeditions that interrupt the narration of Oroonoko's adventures just when they have reached their peak).

As an artist, then, we can see her paralleling quite closely the topics and concerns of the discoverers, but always with a subtle twist. Her naked Indians entertain only the loftiest of emotions, and are careful to wear 'fig-like' aprons whenever they are out of the water. The high-mindedness of these sentiments does not prevent her from mocking the credulity of her hosts in the Indian village, nor does she trouble to moralize the bloody rituals of the warriors there into an ethnographic system. This is partly because, for the purposes of her slave narrative, she is compelled to place the wonders of Surinam in the background - but it also seems to show a personal and considered response to the problems of representation implied by such a project. Fiction must, after all, resist the pressure to generalize exerted on all other forms of analytical prose in order to distinguish its function from theirs.

Having matched her against these models, then, the necessity to chart her innovations becomes more apparent.

⁴⁹Behn, V, 130.

2.3.2 Innovation - Subversion

The first point to note about the structure of Behn's novel is one that has already been raised in passing - the 'realism' claimed for her descriptions. So striking, indeed, is the appearance of verisimilitude, that it has itself been the central topic in most discussions of *Oroonoko*. Recent research has thrown doubt on the previous orthodoxy, established by Ernest Bernbaum's article 'Mrs. Behn's Biography a Fiction'⁵⁰, which claimed that she had never visited the country, but had instead constructed her entire narrative from hints in other writers. B. Dhuicq has demonstrated that many of the Indian words listed in the novel could not have been fabricated, since they match quite closely (but not precisely - proof of dependence) the words in a French vocabulary of the Guianese language⁵¹.

Any attempt to resolve this long-standing controversy would be outside the scope of this study, but the fact that it has dominated debate for so long is significant. The impression of depth and accuracy given by her listings of native customs, local animals, and features of the landscape must be accepted to be a *datum* in itself. Paradoxically, for all the obscurity of Romance which envelops its African scenes, the first major innovation in *Oroonoko* is its attention to detail. This might seem a surprising characterization of a writer of fiction, when set against explorers and historians - but (as we have noted with her description of 'savage' customs) she seems less concerned to explain and interpret, more intent on watching and describing.

The next important point is her introduction of a third factor into the racial equation in the New World. Columbus and the chroniclers dealt only with the Indians and their own followers, but for commentators of Behn's generation, there were the complications of slavery to be addressed. Negroes were, in a sense, honorary natives - simply by virtue of not being white - but they lacked most of the eschatological mystique of the Indians. As Aphra Behn remarks:

before I give you the Story of this *Gallant Slave*, 'tis fit I tell you

⁵⁰PMLA, 28 (1913), 432-53.

⁵¹Dhuicq, 'Behn's Stay in Surinam'.

the Manner of bringing them to these new *Colonies*; those they make Use of there, not being *Natives* of the Place: for those we live with in perfect Amity, without daring to command 'em⁵².

What is more, it is notable that one of these slaves, the 'Royal Prince' Oroonoko of the title, should be the hero of the book - the *indigènes* being largely relegated to the sidelines. Almost half of the book is set in Coramantien, in Africa, and relates the early adventures of Oroonoko, who is the heir to the throne - focussing on his rivalry with his grandfather for the favours of the lovely Imoinda 'the beautiful Black *Venus* to our young *Mars*'⁵³. It is only the contrast in actuality and vividness between the descriptions of this prototypical 'savage kingdom' and those set in Surinam that justifies the claim that it is principally a version of 'South America'.

In a deeper sense, however, one could claim that this choice of a black hero is in fact crucial to the thematic development of the book - and that this in fact constitutes an interpretation of Surinam and what it has become. To explain what I mean, a brief summary of the plot may be in order.

Oroonoko has found his lover Imoinda in Surinam, and has been allowed to unite with her thanks to the good offices of his sympathetic master Treffry (a friend of Aphra Behn's - herself a character in this little drama). The growing conviction that he will not be allowed to return to his own country, and the knowledge that the child that is growing within Imoinda's womb will be born a slave, persuade him to revolt - and he leads the other slaves off into the woods to found a new country:

He said he would travel towards the Sea, plant a new Colony, and defend it by their Valour⁵⁴.

On the way, however, they are overtaken by the whites, and all of his faint-hearted followers flee. Oroonoko surrenders, after being assured of

⁵²Behn, V, 129-30.

⁵³Behn, V, 137.

⁵⁴Behn, V, 192.

honourable treatment, but is promptly flogged 'in a most deplorable and inhuman Manner'⁵⁵.

This is the last straw. Betrayed by his hypocritical masters and abandoned by his own countrymen, he escapes to the woods with Imoinda, and there, in a secluded glade:

he told her his Design, first of killing her, and then his Enemies, and next himself, and the Impossibility of escaping, and therefore he told her the Necessity of dying. He found the heroick Wife faster pleading for Death, than he was to propose it ... and, on her Knees, besought him not to leave her a Prey to his Enemies ...

All that Love could say in such Cases, being ended, and all the intermitting Irresolutions being adjusted, the lovely, young and ador'd Victim lays herself down before the Sacrificer; while he, with a Hand resolved, and a Heart-breaking within, gave the fatal Stroke, first cutting her Throat, and then severing her yet smiling Face from that delicate Body, pregnant as it was with the Fruits of tenderest Love.⁵⁶

The horror of this scene lies essentially in its emphasis on opposites: instead of loving her, the man kills the woman - the Edenic landscape inspires them to death and despair instead of hope (this the man who hoped to 'see if we can meet with more Honour and Honesty in the next World we shall touch upon'⁵⁷). The looking-glass logic of killing her in order to save her from his enemies is paralleled by the fact that our 'New World' Adam and Eve are black and enslaved - not fair and 'free of the fruits of the garden'.

A more substantial paradox, though, is the ghastly way in which Oroonoko is executed by the Europeans - for the crime of 'murder', to which they themselves have driven him by first robbing him of position and dignity, and then forcing him to sacrifice everything to his revenge:

the Executioner came, and first cut off his Members, and threw them into the Fire; after that, with an ill-favour'd Knife, they cut off his Ears and Nose, and burn'd them; he still smoak'd on, as if

⁵⁵Behn, V, 197.

⁵⁶Behn, V, 202-03.

⁵⁷Behn, V, 166-67.

nothing had touch'd him⁵⁸.

This is almost a reenactment of Montaigne's diatribe against the hypocrisy of European complaints about the barbarism of cannibals. Oroonoko is robbed of strength by his 'sacrifice' of Imoinda, and lacks even the steadiness to complete his own suicide when he is found by the Europeans. He must, however, be nursed back to health in order to be killed in the appalling way described above. Once again, a topsy-turvy world with its own negative logic.

There was, in a perverse sense, a sort of love in Oroonoko's action - not so much the fact that he did not want his enemies to trifle with Imoinda, as the way in which the two of them transformed the killing itself almost into an act of love - an erotic ritual of death, paralleling the obsessions of warrior cultures such as the Aztecs (or the Spanish?). In his death, however, there is no love - though it significantly recalls the self-inflicted wound competitions of the Indians:

it's by a passive Valour they shew and prove their Activity; a sort of Courage too brutal to be applauded by our *Black Hero*; nevertheless, he express'd his Esteem of 'em.⁵⁹

This native passivity was displayed before - when Oroonoko insisted on grasping an electric eel, and was fished out of the river, stunned, by the Indians. While in the background of the action, they are, therefore, a pervasive influence - a kind of commentary on the increasingly futile activity of the trapped Oroonoko. The Indians exist on sufferance in their own country, on condition that they cause no trouble, trade with Europe, and remain in the majority. As soon as they step outside these bounds, sentimental regard for their innocence will turn to stern adult retribution.

Oroonoko, then, is the ideal hero for the South America of Aphra Behn's time. Not a native, but a slave; not there by choice, but by force; not able to act, but punished by enforced passivity - he exemplifies the element of 'Dystopia' or malign pastoral in the book. It is, indeed, his personal tragedy, but it is also the

⁵⁸Behn, V, 208.

⁵⁹Behn, V, 188.

tragedy of America. The act of love has been transformed to murder, the verdant landscape to a slave plantation - the Earthly Paradise has been transformed to a Hell on Earth by its discoverers.

Or, as *The Great Gatsby* has it:

as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes - a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees ... had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.⁶⁰

Aphra Behn had found herself a niche - if not a very comforting one - among the interpreters of South America. The 'picture' of the country that she gives us is full of the same features as Columbus's, but with the polarities reversed. Where he allows us to extrapolate doubleness, she embodies it - where he saw a paradise, she sees a trap (the 'golden Indians' from up-country in the middle of the novel) - where he imposed an Andalucian pastoral, she puts a *grand guignol*.

Our mythological paradigms can thus be seen to lend themselves as much to melodrama as to landscape evocation. A desire to specify the 'moment' of her fictional interpretation has compelled a perhaps misleading emphasis on the chronology of this picture of the New World; but in the next chapter, we will see a proportionate stress on the genealogical complexities of genre.

⁶⁰F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London, 1949), pp.163-64.

PART 2

Historians and Naturalists

Chapter 3

Darwin and the Naturalists

3.1 L'invitation au Voyage

In conclusion, it appears to me that nothing can be more improving to a young naturalist, than a journey in distant countries. It both sharpens, and partly allays that want and craving, which, as Sir J. Herschel remarks, a man experiences although every corporeal sense be fully satisfied. The excitement from the novelty of objects, and the chance of success, stimulate him to increased activity. Moreover, as a number of isolated facts soon become uninteresting, the habit of comparison leads to generalization.¹

The Voyage, or 'journey in distant countries', might well be regarded as the Naturalist's equivalent of the Grand Tour - a period abroad to round off and exploit one's years of education.

Certainly this point can be illustrated by looking at the careers of a number of representative Enlightenment Naturalists. Of Sir Joseph Banks, for instance - Ship's Naturalist aboard the Endeavour - it has been said:

His own fieldwork was limited and quickly over. He made a natural philosopher's anti-Grand Tour to Labrador at the age of twenty-three; then he supervised the plant-hunting on the Endeavour's voyage; after his return he made a trip to the Hebrides and Iceland. But that was virtually the end of it ... Instead he garnered the fruits of the fieldwork of others, trips he usually organized and often paid for himself.²

Pat Rogers, who made these comments in a recent review, equates Banks' first excursion to Labrador with a 'natural philosopher's anti-Grand Tour', but one might apply this term just as accurately to his circumnavigation with Captain Cook. Assuming that Rogers means the sobriquet 'anti' to apply to the 'anti-dilettantishness' of these scientific journeys, Banks seems actually a more typical case than he acknowledges - a contention which might be substantiated by

¹Darwin, Journal, p.368.

²Pat Rogers, 'Monument to the Multitudinous', TLS, 3 June 1988, p.603.

providing a similar career-summary of one of his successors, Alexander von Humboldt.

After a student's field-trip through Holland, England, and France in 1791 (in the company of another veteran of Cook's voyages, Georg Forster), Humboldt devoted the rest of his university education to rigorous preparations for his great South American expedition of 1799 to 1804. After his return he spent twenty years, mainly in Paris, writing up his collections and diaries for publication - a series that eventually reached 35 volumes (comparable to Banks' work on the *Florilegium*, a compendium of the flowers and plants encountered by him on his travels, which remained unpublished until after his death). In 1827, with this task substantially complete, Humboldt planned another journey on a similar scale to the East - to India and the Himalayas. Circumstances, however (mainly the intransigence of the East India Company), made this impossible, so he had to content himself with diplomatic life in Berlin. He made one further research trip to Russia and Siberia in 1829, but this could not be compared in scope or importance with the South American expedition; partly because his role was restricted to supervising the other scientists who had been invited along. The rest of his life was devoted to the *Kosmos*, a vast attempt to anatomize and describe the laws of the known universe, which remained incomplete at his death in 1859.³

Scientific and rigorous though it may have aspired to be, Claude Lévi-Strauss sees an analogy between this convention of the 'Naturalist's Voyage' and the puberty rituals of native tribes (not essentially dissimilar in their nature from the Grand Tour, one is tempted to add):

Qui ne voit à quel point cette <<quête du pouvoir>> se trouve remise en honneur dans la société française contemporaine sous la forme naïve du rapport entre le public et <<ses>> explorateurs? Dès l'âge de la puberté aussi, nos adolescents trouvent licence d'obéir aux stimulations auxquelles tout les soumet depuis la petite enfance, et de franchir, d'une manière quelconque, l'emprise momentanée de leur civilisation. Ce peut être en hauteur, par l'ascension de quelque montagne; ou en profondeur, en descendant dans les abîmes; horizontalement aussi,

³Information from Alexander von Humboldt: 1769/1969, by Adolf Meyer-Abich and Cedric Hentschel (Bonn & Bad Godesberg, 1969).

si l'on s'avance au coeur de régions lointaines.⁴

There are some distinctions which need to be made here. We have, on the one hand, a generalized paradigm of 'Voyages' or explorations made by young people in order to 'franchir ... l'emprise momentanée de leur civilisation'. These might be aligned with tribal masculine puberty ordeals, with the European 'Grand Tour', or even Romantic artistic 'escapes' such as Baudelaire's trip to India (1841-42), Flaubert's Egyptian expedition (1849-51), or Gérard de Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1851). On the other hand, we have professional research journeys, undertaken by young natural scientists (Banks, Humboldt, Darwin, Huxley, Bates, Wallace) both as a final polish to their education and an opportunity to gather the raw material on which they could work for the rest of their careers. As Darwin remarked, at the beginning of the *Beagle* voyage:

perhaps I may have the same opportunity of drilling my mind that I threw away at Cambridge.⁵

However, while the researches of Naturalists like Humboldt and Darwin laid the foundations of modern disciplines like Geography, Botany, Geology, Zoology, and the Life Sciences generally, it would be a mistake to see these seminal figures entirely in terms of those studies. Both Darwin and Humboldt had a strong interest in literature and literary matters generally. Humboldt had, in fact, composed an 'allegorical fable': *Die Lebenskraft oder der rhodische Genius* (1795), which had been printed by Schiller and admired by Goethe. His works

⁴Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, Terre Humaine (Paris, 1982), pp.41-42: 'It is obvious that this 'quest for power' [through rituals] enjoys a renewed vogue in contemporary French society, in the unsophisticated form of the relationship between the public and 'its' explorers. Our adolescents too, from puberty onwards, are free to obey the stimuli which have been acting upon them from all sides since early childhood, and to escape, in some way or other, from the temporary hold their civilization has on them. The escape may take place upwards, through the climbing of a mountain, or downwards, by descending into the bowels of the earth, or horizontally, through travel to remote countries.' (translations quoted from Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, translated by John and Doreen Weightman (Harmondsworth, 1984) - page numbers thus (47)).

⁵Darwin, *Diary*, p.13.

are full of musings on the subject of the correct artistic emphasis to apply to landscape description (curtailment of detail in the interests of a more accurate overall impression) - and he attempts to analyze literature and art in the same taxonomic terms already applied by him to plants and minerals in volume 2 of *Der Kosmos* (1847). Darwin too was alert to the problems of representing Nature, as is shown by the care with which he pruned and revised his descriptions in the *Journal of Researches* (1839; revised second edition 1845). Above all, the desirability of producing a textual artefact to match the artefact of the perfectly planned and accomplished 'Naturalist's Journey' was always present in their minds, as we will find if we return and examine more closely the quotation by Darwin with which I headed this section.

While his recommendation of the 'journey' to young Naturalists sounds like rhetorical generalization, Darwin's argument in fact breaks down quite neatly into three parts, isolated in three successive sentences. Interestingly, he begins with a quasi-metaphysical justification, quoting Sir John Herschel's influential *Introduction to the Study of Natural Philosophy* on the desire for something more than 'corporeal' gratification - an almost Wordsworthian sentiment. He then mentions a further incitement - the attraction of novelty, and the possibilities of success and distinction that accompany it. This is, of course, an observation prompted by his own experiences on the voyage (he expands on it a little in his *Autobiography*:

As far as I can judge of myself, I worked to the utmost during the voyage for the mere pleasure of investigation, and from my strong desire to add a few facts to the great mass of facts in natural science. But I was also ambitious to take a fair place amongst scientific men, - whether more ambitious or less so than most of my fellow-workers I can form no opinion.⁶)

Finally, we come to the third point touched upon in this passage: how 'the habit of comparison leads to generalization'. The voyage of the Beagle itself supports this assertion, since the specific observations made by Darwin led

⁶Autobiographies, by Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley, edited by Gavin de Beer (London, 1974), p.46.

eventually to the theory of Evolution - but leaving that aside for the moment, we can see the principle operating in this very passage, where Darwin makes his own experience, his own voyage, exemplary. True, he acknowledges, there are disadvantages to this arrangement:

as the traveller stays but a short time in each place, his descriptions must generally consist of mere sketches, instead of detailed observations. Hence arises, as I have found to my cost, a constant tendency to fill up the wide gaps of knowledge, by inaccurate and superficial hypotheses.⁷

Let us take the last point first. Most accounts of voyages are written in the form of diaries, or are at least based on diaries that have been kept during the trip. The sense of day-to-day fortuitous discovery which can be imparted by employing this form - and which parallels the similar chances which determine the success or failure of an expedition - can be either obscured by turning disparate entries into a single seamless narrative, or enhanced by guarding the convention of dates and daily entries. Both Darwin and Humboldt use a combination of the two methods. While it would be false to claim that the voyage was the text a Naturalist made it into, it is clear that disentangling the two becomes problematic in such cases. Perhaps, then, it is safer to say that the two, Voyage and Text, are subject to parallel influences. Both are planned carefully in advance, both are subject to fortuitous chance during their execution, and one's final assessment of both is conditioned by results.

The pressure to produce accurate scientific results (one thing which the Naturalist of the nineteenth century has in common with the Life Scientist of today) is of a rather different nature. Both Darwin and Humboldt published their travel accounts separately from the main body of their results. In Humboldt's case, his personal narrative, the *Relation historique du voyage aux régions équinoxiales du Nouveau Continent* appeared in 3 volumes between 1814 and 1825. His scientific results, by contrast, came out in 35 volumes (consisting of Astronomical and Geophysical Data, Botany, Geography of Plants, Zoology and

⁷ Darwin, *Journal*, pp.368-69.

Comparative Anatomy, the Politics of Mexico, and a General Report on the Journey and Geography) between 1808 and 1827. As for Darwin, his *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries Visited by H.M.S. 'Beagle'* was included as the third volume of the official account of the voyage, edited by Captain FitzRoy and published in 1839. The scientific results were issued as *The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. 'Beagle'*, in 5 vols (1839-43); and *The Geology of the Voyage of the 'Beagle'*, in 3 parts (1842, 1844, and 1846). This ratio of three to thirty-five, and one to eight, outlines the principal problem of any Naturalist with literary aspirations - that of selection.

Humboldt sums up the matter very neatly in the preface to his personal narrative:

Had I adopted a mode of composition, which should have contained in the same chapter all that has been observed on the same point of the globe, I should have composed a work of cumbrous length, and devoid of that clearness, which arises in a great measure from the methodical distribution of the matter.⁸

The solution, then, is to group together the facts and observations connected with a particular subject. (It is notable that this is precisely the method adopted by Darwin in the published form of his *Journal*:

To prevent useless repetitions, I will extract those parts of my journal which refer to the same districts, without always attending to the order in which we visited them.⁹)

The difficulty, however, is to preserve the spontaneity of the original account while rejecting its diffuseness and lack of form:

The richness of nature leads to a piling up of individual images, and this disturbs the balance and overall impression projected by the 'painting'. If the style is to appeal to emotion and imagination,

⁸Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent, During the Years 1799-1804*, by Alexander de Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland, translated by Helen Maria Williams, 7 vols (London, 1814-29), I, xviii. This was the translation used by Darwin, and the one which he took with him on the *Beagle* (information from Darwin, *Diary*, p.24).

⁹Darwin, *Journal*, p.29.

it all too easily degenerates into poetic prose.¹⁰

These are two separate pitfalls. One is to overvalue the details at the expense of the picture; the other is to turn the picture into an exercise in 'poetic prose'. Both ability as a writer, and a correct theory of writing about landscape are therefore required if one is to convey:

A view of nature as a totality, proof of the working together of various forces, a renewal of the pleasure aroused in the breast of any sensitive person at the sight of the tropics¹¹.

which are, Humboldt says, 'the aims I strive for'.

All of which brings us to the first point made by Darwin in his recommendation of the journey to young Naturalists - what might be called the metaphysical justification for this 'Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone'¹². We noted, above, the Wordsworthian aspect of this desire which 'a man experiences although every corporeal sense be fully satisfied':

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar¹³.

But it now appears that we can proceed with more confidence to locate this aspect of the Naturalist's Voyage in the context of the Voyage as an adolescent 'escape' - or (its natural extension), a Romantic literary motif - in the terms suggested by Lévi-Strauss.

Just as the Naturalist must artfully select details from his experiences with the intention of 1/ conveying the sense of a spontaneous experience, not wholly

¹⁰Cedric Hentschel, 'Alexander von Humboldt's Synthesis of Literature and Science', in Humboldt: 1769/1969, pp.95-132 (p.110).

¹¹Humboldt: 1769/1969, p.109.

¹²The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by John Morley (London, 1924), p.250. (The Prelude, iii, 63).

¹³Wordsworth, p.359. ('Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', ll.59-62). Indeed Darwin himself remarks: 'About this time [1837-39] I took much delight in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry, and can boast that I read the Excursion twice through', Darwin & Huxley, Autobiographies, p.49.

arranged in retrospect; 2/ avoiding a picture cluttered by too much incidental information; and 3/ not lapsing into 'poetic prose' and evocation for its own sake - so the creative artist must convey the general in terms of the particular. The Voyage is extremely valuable in this connection, implying, as it does, a constantly changing scene of action (yet one which, if required, can be portrayed as monotonous through its very variety). The ship is useful as an assurance of a fixed set of characters in a bounded space (and as tangible expression of the 'ship of society'). The physical surroundings of sea and sky, what is more, evoke almost automatically an expression of awe and wonder at the grandeur of the physical world (thus entailing a redefinition of one's own consequence amongst these 'giant forms').

One could perhaps summarize the various influences involved as follows. At one extreme we have the Voyage as a literary motif - as first exemplified in (presumably) Homer's *Odyssey*, and then a succession of early nineteenth century works such as 'L'Albatros', 'Le Voyage' and 'L'invitation au Voyage' in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857); Tennyson's 'Ulysses' (1842); Edgar Allan Poe's 'MS. Found in a Bottle' (1833), 'The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal' (1835) and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, of Nantucket* (1838); along with Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846) and *Mardi, and a Voyage Thither* (1849). At the other extreme we have the voyage as a purely scientific project - as a contribution to knowledge in its purest form (as exemplified in the 35 volumes occupied by the results from Humboldt's expedition, or the eight volumes of geological and zoological data deduced from Darwin's collections). The 'Naturalist's Voyage' as a genre lies somewhere in between. Just as the actual voyage and the account that results from it are subject to parallel chance influences, so the 'Naturalist's Voyage' as a text is acted upon almost equally by impulses from each side - the extent in each case being governed as much by the expectations of an audience as the predisposition of the writer concerned.

The introduction to the last chapter was largely concerned with the methodological implications of chronology in a study as temporally wide-ranging as this. I said there that the 'synchronic section' which could be seen to be operating on a single text (such as Darwin's - published in 1839, but continuously composed and revised over the period 1831-45) was far more extensive than a

strict definition of the term would suggest. The generic distinctions made there between 'Journal' and 'Romance' were, by contrast, fairly perfunctory - and I therefore propose to highlight that aspect in dealing with the curious hybrid that is Darwin's *Journal of Researches*.

This chapter is arranged in two main sections, each intended to represent simultaneously a characteristic myth or vision of South America, and an essential stage in our reading of the nature of Darwin's text. The first, 'The Brazilian Forest', examines the actual process of textual accretion in the progress from his experiences to the final published text - through the intermediate stages of notebooks, letters, and Diary. The second, 'The Voyage of the Beagle', attempts to read Darwin's travel narrative as both influenced by and as a contribution to the Romantic iconography of the Voyage. In order to do this, I shall be looking at Darwin's textual antecedents in Humboldt's *Personal Narrative*, and in the poetry of Wordsworth and Milton (which had an approximately equal influence on him).

The structure, then, is essentially the same as the last chapter, although it introduces a new emphasis on the particularity - rather than the exemplary nature - of its central text. Only by balancing with equal care the dual influences of genre and literary precedent will it be possible to see clearly Darwin's specific contribution to any larger literary *topos* of 'South America'.

3.2 The Brazilian Forest

The day has passed delightfully: delight is however a weak term for such transports of pleasure: I have been wandering by myself in a Brazilian forest: amongst the multitude it is hard to say what set of objects is most striking; the general luxuriance of the vegetation bears the victory, the elegance of the grasses, the novelty of the parasitical plants, the beauty of the flowers. - the glossy green of the foliage, all tend to this end. - A most paradoxical mixture of sound & silence pervades the shady parts of the wood. - the noise from the insects is so loud that in the evening it can be heard even in a vessel anchored several hundred yards from the shore. - Yet within the recesses of the forest when in the midst of it a universal stillness appears to reign. - To a person fond of Natural history such a day as this brings with it pleasure more acute than he ever may again experience. - After wandering about for some hours, I returned to the landing place. - Before reaching it I was overtaken by a Tropical storm. - I tried to find shelter under a tree so thick that it would never have been penetrated by common English rain, yet here in a couple of minutes, a little torrent flowed down the trunk. It is to this violence we must attribute the verdure in the bottom of the wood. - if the showers were like those of a colder clime, the moisture would be absorbed or evaporated before reaching the ground.¹⁴

Here is the true voice of feeling; the words written by Charles Darwin in his diary (hereafter referred to as the *Diary*) after going ashore for the first time in South America. And here is what they became in the second edition of his *Journal of Researches* (1845, hereafter referred to as the *Journal*) - which may be regarded for our purposes as the definitive version of his text, since it differs in many particulars from the original edition of 1839:

The day has passed delightfully. Delight itself, however, is a weak term to express the feelings of a naturalist who, for the first time, has wandered by himself in a Brazilian forest. The elegance of the grasses, the novelty of the parasitical plants, the beauty of the flowers, the glossy green of the foliage, but above all the general luxuriance of the vegetation, filled me with admiration. A most paradoxical mixture of sound and silence pervades the shady parts of the wood. The noise from the insects is so loud, that it may be heard even in a vessel anchored several hundred yards from the shore; yet within the recesses of the forest a universal silence appears to reign. To a person fond of natural history, such a day as this brings with it a deeper pleasure than he can ever hope to

¹⁴Darwin, *Diary*, p.42.

experience again. After wandering about for some hours, I returned to the landing-place; but, before reaching it, I was overtaken by a tropical storm. I tried to find shelter under a tree, which was so thick that it would never have been penetrated by common English rain; but here, in a couple of minutes, a little torrent flowed down the trunk. It is to this violence of the rain that we must attribute the verdure at the bottom of the thickest woods: if the showers were like those of a colder clime, the greater part would be absorbed or evaporated before it reached the ground.¹⁵

Before we begin to examine the specific divergences between these two versions, and the reasons for them, let us go a little deeper into the textual history of Darwin's account.

On going ashore at a new location, Darwin would record his immediate impressions in a small notebook (24 of which survive, and have been partially transcribed by Nora Barlow¹⁶). When he had completed his observations, or was at leisure, he would expand these notes into an entry for his Diary (referred to by him, confusingly, as the 'Journal'). Also, he often described the same scenes in letters to his family and friends, so these provide yet another medium for expressing the same sensations.

The notes, then, on Brazilian forests, include passages like the following:

¹⁵Darwin, *Journal*, p.9. I shall record all significant departures from the first edition text in footnotes. Here, for example, aside from a few accidentals, the substantive changes are from 'has been wandering by himself' (1839), to 'has wandered by himself' (1845) in the second sentence; the inversion of 'he ever can hope again to experience' (1839), to 'he can ever hope to experience again' (1845) in the sixth sentence; and the addition of 'that' (1845) to 'it is to the rain we must attribute' (1839) in the ninth. The only major change is between: 'Among the multitude of striking objects, the general luxuriance of the vegetation bears away the victory. The elegance of the grasses, the novelty of the parasitical plants, the beauty of the flowers, the glossy green of the foliage, all tend to this end.' (1839), which has become the single sentence: 'The elegance of the grasses, the novelty of the parasitical plants, the beauty of the flowers, the glossy green of the foliage, but above all the general luxuriance of the vegetation, filled me with admiration.' (1845) - (Information from the first edition text reprinted in *Voyage of the Beagle* Charles Darwin's *Journal of Researches*, edited by Janet Browne and Michael Neve (Harmondsworth, 1989), p.50).

¹⁶Charles Darwin and the *Voyage of the Beagle*, edited by Nora Barlow (London, 1945), pp.149-268.

Sosego. Twiners entwining twiners - tresses like hair - beautiful lepidoptera - Silence - hosannah - Frog habits like toad - slow jumps - iris copper-coloured, colour became faint. Snake, fresh water fish, edible; musky shell, stain fingers red. One fish from salt Lagoa de Boacia, 2 from brook; one do. pricks the fingers -¹⁷.

In the *Diary*, this becomes 'These two days were spent at Socêgo, & was the most enjoyable part of the whole expedition; the greater part of them was spent in the woods, & I succeeded in collecting many insects & reptiles'¹⁸. The 'twiners entwining twiners' have been expanded into 'The woody creepers, themselves covered by creepers', and the 'tresses like hair' to 'tresses of a liana, which much resembles bundles of hay'¹⁹. The 'hosannah' may refer to the fact, noted both in the *Journal* and in the *Diary*, of the silence of his walk being 'broken by the morning hymn, raised on high by the whole body of the blacks [on the *fazênda* there]²⁰ (but this was two days before, so it may be merely an expression of praise at the beauty of the scene). In any case, these raptures are still further truncated in the *Journal*: 'In returning we spent two days at Socêgo, and I employed them in collecting insects in the forest. The greater number of trees, although so lofty, are not more than three or four feet in circumference.'²¹

Unfortunately the notes which prompted the passage which I have quoted at the beginning of this section have not survived (or been transcribed); the closest equivalent being the following, from a few months later:

Silence well exemplified; - rippling of a brook. Lofty trees, white boles; the pleasure of eating my lunch on one of the rotten trees - so gloomy that only shean of light enters the profound. Tops of the trees enlumined; cold camp feel.²²

This becomes, in the *Diary*, 'A profound gloom reigns everywhere; it would be impossible to tell the sun was shining, if it was not for an occasional gleam of light

¹⁷*Voyage of the Beagle*, p.162.

¹⁸Darwin, *Diary*, p.58.

¹⁹Darwin, *Diary*, p.59.

²⁰Darwin, *Journal*, p.17. (See also Darwin, *Diary*, p.57; and Browne & Neve, *Voyage*, p.61).

²¹Darwin, *Journal*, p.18.

²²*Voyage of the Beagle*, p.165.

shooting, as it were through a shutter, on the ground beneath; & that the tops of the more lofty trees are brightly illuminated. - The air is motionless & has a peculiar chilling dampness. - Whilst seated on the trunk of a decaying tree amidst such scenes, one feels an inexpressible delight. - The rippling of some little brook, the tap of a Woodpecker, or scream of some more distant bird, by the distinctness with which it is heard, brings the conviction how still the rest of Nature is²³.

Here we see the rewriting mechanism really in action. The 'lunch' has gone - perhaps because it is not sufficiently august, but more likely because it does not fit with Darwin's own stated principle of description: 'the habit of comparison leads to generalization'. The poetic expression 'the profound' has become 'a profound gloom'; 'enlumined' has become 'illuminated'; the evocative 'cold camp feel' has become 'a peculiar chilling dampness'. It is almost as if a Modernist text has been juxtaposed with a nineteenth century one - the first notes resembling the acuteness of vision of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*, while the transcription makes them seem a conscious rhetorical exercise.

The potentially distorting quality of this allegedly 'simple' procedure of copying notes makes it easier to understand why Joseph Huxley described Darwin's working notebooks from the voyage as a mass of "'worthless MSS" ... because of his lack of training in Biology²⁴. From our point of view, however, they make clear the precise sort of composition at which Darwin was aiming - one which would be flexible enough to include scientific observations side by side with anecdotes and descriptive passages, not to mention the human story of the voyage. For this reason, no one aspect could be emphasized too much - which explains the sometimes rather jerky feel of the *Journal* by comparison with the more relaxed and capacious *Diary*.

The letters represent yet another textualizing impulse:

Nobody but a person fond of Nat: history, can imagine the

²³Darwin, *Diary*, p.74.

²⁴*Voyage of the Beagle*, p.149.

pleasure of strolling under Cocoa nuts in a thicket of Bananas & Coffee plants, & an endless number of wild flowers. - And this Island that has given me so much instruction & delight, is reckoned the most uninteresting place, that we perhaps shall touch at during our voyage.²⁵

Interestingly, this statement about 'being unable to imagine the pleasure' - applied here to St. Jago - closely parallels his remarks about 'such a day bringing with it pleasure more acute than [a person fond of Natural History] ever may again experience' in the *Diary* description of Bahia. Any confusion between the two descriptions is, however, accounted for a little further down in this letter (addressed to his father):

I have written this much in order to save time at Bahia.²⁶

A verbal characterization of Brazil may therefore be quite legitimately displaced onto another 'tropical' paradise.

Finally, the long documentary letter actually reaches Bahia:

I arrived at this place on the 28th of Feb & am now writing this letter after having in real earnest strolled in the forests of the new world. - 'No person could imagine anything so beautiful as the antient town of Bahia; it is fairly embosomed in a luxuriant wood of beautiful trees ... the bay is scattered over with large ships. in short & what can be said more it is one of the finest views in the Brazils'. - (copied from my journal) ... If you really want to have a <notion> of tropical countries, *study* Humboldt. - Skip th<e> scientific parts & commence after leaving Teneriffe. - My feelings amount to admiration the more I read him.²⁷

We thus see, in a nutshell, the two separate lines of descent of Darwin's text. The first is his own notes and journal entries, which could be paraphrased or even quoted verbatim in the attempt to convey some impression of what he was experiencing to those at home (a not dissimilar problem from the one that faced him when he 'wrote up' the journal itself). The second is his response to the

²⁵The *Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, Volume I: 1821-1836, edited by Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith (Cambridge, 1985), p.202.

²⁶Darwin, *Correspondence*, I, 203.

²⁷Darwin, *Correspondence*, I, 204.

tropical descriptions in Humboldt's *Personal Narrative*; and references to this are scattered through the letters and entries (some surviving even into the published *Journal*) - giving his work, at times, the atmosphere of a commentary on the earlier text, a sort of 'in the footsteps of' Humboldt.

With reference to the first of these aspects, he himself remarks:

It is very odd, what a difficult job I find this same writing letters to be. - I suppose it is partly owing to my writing everything in my journal: but chiefly to the number of subjects; which is so bewildering that I am generally at a loss either how to begin or end a sentence. And this all hands must allow to be an objection. ⁻²⁸

The entire process of composing his final text, charted in this section, could be said to be an illustration of this remark. We see him go from fragmentary statements such as 'beautiful lepidoptera - Silence - hosannah - Frog habits like toad', to the hasty syntax of some of the *Diary* entries: 'amongst the multitude it is hard to say what set of objects is most striking; the general luxuriance of the vegetation bears the victory, the elegance of the grasses ... the glossy green of the foliage, all tend to this end'. He then repeats these impressions in different words in letters home - sometimes using a particular phrase from the *Diary* in a different context, in order to 'save time at Bahia'. Finally, he painstakingly rephrased, cut and expanded (almost by half) the whole into the published *Journal* (1839), which was further rewritten for its second edition in 1845 - the received text. Before I begin to look at the implications of this process of composition, however, it seems best to examine in a brief excursus Darwin's specific debt to Humboldt - the second 'line of descent' mentioned above.

Let us begin by quoting some representative passages from Humboldt, and then look at Darwin's reaction to them.

Vegetation here displays some of its fairest and most majestic forms in the banana and the palm-tree. He who is awake to the charms of nature finds in this delicious island remedies still more potent than the climate. No abode appeared to me more fitted to dissipate melancholy, and restore peace to the perturbed mind, than that of Teneriffe, or Madeira ...

²⁸Darwin, *Correspondence*, I, 219.

The baobabs are of still greater dimensions than the dragon-tree of Orotava. There are some, which near the root measure 34 feet in diameter, though their total height is only from 50 to 60 feet ... That in Mr. Franqui's garden bears still every year both flowers and fruit. Its aspect feelingly recalls to mind 'that eternal youth of nature,' which is an inexhaustible source of motion and of life ...

On leaving Orotava, a narrow and stony pathway led us across a beautiful forest of chesnut trees, *el monte de Castannos*, to a site which is covered with brambles, some species of laurels, and arborescent heaths. The trunks of the last grow to an extraordinary size; and the flowers with which they are loaded form an agreeable contrast, during a great part of the year, with the hypericum canariense, which is very abundant at this height. We stopped to take in our provision of water under a solitary firtree ...²⁹.

Humboldt has rejected the diary format in favour of an episodic narrative of events, and the 'scientific parts' are more lavishly treated in his text. Nevertheless, there is something rather evocative in his 'rich and smiling verdure'³⁰ and endlessly 'attractive prospects'. I have tried to quote examples of his generalizations, his classifications of particular plants (the baobab), and his account of a walk - and, while the first is the one which can be observed most directly influencing Darwin's expression ('He who is awake to the charms of nature' becoming 'a person fond of Natural history'), the other two can be seen to inspire categories of description in both Diary and Journal.

Take the passage at the beginning of this section, for instance. It is a description of action, like Humboldt's: 'wandering by myself' - 'wandering about for some hours' - 'before reaching it'; but it ends with an account of the tree he sheltered under, together with speculations on the thickness of the 'verdure in the bottom of the wood'. Containing, as it does, generalizations like 'delight is a weak word for such transports of pleasure', and 'pleasure more acute than he ever may again experience', we see that it includes all three of the categories highlighted in Humboldt's text: action, scientific detail, and generalization.

²⁹Humboldt, Personal Narrative, I, 127, 143-44 & 145-46.

³⁰Humboldt, Personal Narrative, I, 134.

So what are we to conclude from this? There is no doubt of the amount of attention Darwin paid to Humboldt's text. He says in his *Autobiography*:

During my last year at Cambridge I read with care and profound interest Humboldt's Personal Narrative ... I copied out from Humboldt long passages about Teneriffe, and read them aloud ... to (I think) Henslow, Ramsay and Dawes; for on a previous occasion I had talked about the glories of Teneriffe and some of the party declared they would endeavour to go there³¹.

Elsewhere we find references to: 'a very pleasant afternoon lying on the sofa ... reading Humboldts glowing accounts of tropical scenery'; 'Already can I understand Humboldts enthusiasm about the tropical nights'; 'I am at present fit only to read Humboldt; he like another Sun illumines everything I behold'; and, most importantly, 'Here I first saw the glory of tropical vegetation. Tamarinds, Bananas & Palms were flourishing at my feet. - I expected a good deal, for I had read Humboldts descriptions & I was afraid of disappointments'³².

It would not be putting it too strongly to say that Darwin came text in hand to South America. We see here that his highest praise for the wonders of the Brazilian forest is to say, of Humboldt's description, that 'even he ... with all this falls far short of the truth'³³. Oblique praise - to expect the reality to justify itself against the text. It is not that Darwin is behindhand in recording his rapture at the sight of tropical scenery - it is simply that he does so in a manner as much conditioned by the rhetorical traditions he has inherited as by the sights themselves ('If we rank scenery according to the astonishment it produces, this [the Caucovado at Rio de Janeiro] most assuredly occupies the highest place, but if, as is more true, according to the picturesque effect, it falls far short of many in the neighbourhead'³⁴). The main reason for treating Humboldt in such detail, then, is to introduce a note of specificity into this textual dependence:

Few things give me so much pleasure as reading the Personal Narrative; I know not the reason why a thought which has passed

³¹Darwin & Huxley, *Autobiographies*, p.38.

³²Darwin, *Diary*, pp. 18, 20, 42 & 23.

³³Darwin, *Diary*, p.42.

³⁴Darwin, *Diary*, p.67.

through the mind, when we see it embodied in words, immediately assumes a more substantial & true air.³⁵

With this in mind, let us return to the two passages at the head of this section. The *Diary* records the 'transports of pleasure' associated with the fact that 'I have been wandering by myself in a Brazilian forest'. The *Journal*, on the other hand, says that: 'Delight itself is a weak term to express the feelings of a naturalist who, for the first time, has wandered by himself in a Brazilian forest'. The first person immediacy of the first entry inevitably appeals more to a modern sensibility, but that is not really the point. The point is that Darwin has been forced to objectify his narrative, to turn 'I' into the 'person fond of Natural history' and the 'naturalist who ... has wandered by himself in a Brazilian forest', for a specific reason. This is because the reader of a book like Darwin's, representing the genre of 'Naturalist's Voyage', does not expect, and will not trust, a subjective record of the experiences of a first-person narrator. Rather, he expects an account of a foreign country which will enable him in some way to apprehend the reality of that country. No more does he desire, of course, a completely impersonal summary of landscape features - there must be anecdotes and personal experiences included, but as clearly identified adjuncts to the main thrust of locating the narrative in objective fact. This is, indeed, the process of 'generalization' favoured by Darwin in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Darwin, then, is forced to construct a sort of ideal narrative out of his own experience of the voyage. Each successive overlay of writing is another step in this process - with the author himself becoming an increasingly objectified character, like the Dante of the *Divina Commedia*. Darwin's project might therefore be conceived as a series of rhetorical shifts designed to convey a truer overall picture of the voyage - but also, as a corollary, supplanting it in favour of another, textual identity.

Our original discussion of the Naturalist's Voyage as an artefact - to be

³⁵Darwin, *Diary*, p.67.

re-created by the written description of that voyage - can therefore be supplemented with the effect of distancing achieved by these successive exercises in style. The effect of going from the Notebooks to the *Diary*, sideways to the Letters, and on to the two editions of the *Journal*, takes one steadily further from the experiences themselves. To some extent this is an inevitable process - but the replacement of the genuine question 'it is hard to see what set of objects is most striking' in the *Diary* with, first, the more decisive 'the general luxuriance of the vegetation bears away the victory' in the 1839 edition of the *Journal*; and, finally, a mere listing of objects which 'filled me with admiration' in 1845, seems a gradual falsification indulged in for reasons of style, not sense. The literary precedent of Humboldt also enables him to transfer responsibility for interpreting what he sees: 'If you really want to have a notion of tropical countries, *study Humboldt*'.

Our question must remain - having established the context in which Darwin is writing, and the process of generation of his text - what picture of South America he actually creates. His picture of the Brazilian forest is apparently generically 'tropical', since parts of it can be transferred from descriptions of Teneriffe and Madeira; yet he also makes reference to Brazil as 'the new world' and the fact that 'Brazilian scenery is nothing more nor less than a view in the Arabian Nights, with the advantage of reality'³⁶. To expand on these hints about the terms in which the words 'South America' are operating in Darwin's travel journal, I shall be examining his attitude towards the human clientele of the countries visited by him - Spaniards, Indians, and gauchos. This will then be supplemented by an account of the reactions to the Andes (or 'Cordillera'), with which he rounded off this part of his circumnavigation.

³⁶Darwin, *Diary*, p.43.

3.3 The Voyage of the Beagle

3.3.1 Gauchos and Indians

The object of this chapter is, as we have seen, two-fold: it seeks to establish the generic terms in which we can best define Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* as a textual artefact; and, as a natural accompaniment, it attempts to elicit the reading he has provided of the place most 'visited' by his text - South America (at least three fifths of the entries being devoted to it alone³⁷). The first two sections were occupied mainly by the former objective, but introduce the system of categories which I intend to employ in these last two sections - devoted, respectively, to the People and the works of Nature in Darwin's 'South America'.

Let us begin by defining the classes of people Darwin includes in his narrative. There are, according to my reading, at least four different groups:

1/ **Gauchos.** About these Darwin talks a good deal:

There were several of the wild Gaucho cavalry waiting to see us land; they formed by far the most savage picturesque group I ever beheld. - I should have fancied myself in the middle of Turkey by their dresses ... The men themselves were far more remarkable than their dresses; the greater number were half Spaniard & Indian. - some of each pure blood & some black.³⁸

On the subject of such men of 'mixed breed, between Negro, Indian, and Spaniard', Darwin remarks in the *Journal*: 'I know not the reason, but men of such origin seldom have a good expression of countenance'³⁹. In a more generalized passage, he explains:

We dined at a Pulperia, where there were present many Gauchos (this name only means 'countrymen' & those who dress in this manner & lead their life) ... If their surprise was great, mine was much greater to find such ignorance; & this amongst people who possess their thousands of cattle & 'estancia's' of great extent ... I was asked whether the earth or sun moved; whether it was hotter or colder to the North; where Spain was & many more such

³⁷Information from Browne & Neve, *Voyage*, p.16.

³⁸Darwin, *Diary*, pp.99-100.

³⁹Darwin, *Journal*, p.51.

questions. - Most of the inhabitants have an indistinct idea, that England, London, N. America are all the same place; the better informed well know that England & N: America are separate countries close together; but that England is a large town in London ... I am writing as if I had been amongst the inhabitants of central Africa. Banda Oriental would not be flattered by the comparison, but such was my feeling when amongst them.⁴⁰

He sums up:

The Gauchos, or countrymen, are very superior to those who reside in the towns. The Gaucho is invariably most obliging, polite, and hospitable: I did not meet with even one instance of rudeness or inhospitality. He is modest, both respecting himself and country, but at the same time a spirited, bold fellow. On the other hand, many robberies are committed, and there is much bloodshed ... It is lamentable to hear how many lives are lost in trifling quarrels. In fighting, each party tries to mark the face of his adversary by slashing his nose or eyes; as is often attested by deep and horrid-looking scars ... At Mercedes I asked two men why they did not work. One gravely said the days were too long; the other that he was too poor. The number of horses and the profusion of food are the destruction of all industry.⁴¹

The change of tone brought about by a slight change of register is very apparent in this last extract from the *Journal*. The *Diary* says 'Their politeness is excessive, they never drink their spirits, without expecting you to taste it; but as they make their exceedingly good bow, they seem quite ready, if occasion offered, to cut your throat at the same time'⁴² - a rather more vivid expression than their being 'invariably most obliging, polite, and hospitable'. The burden of the two remarks is much the same, but the tabular form - arguments pro and contra gaucho life - adopted in the *Journal* gives it a more authoritative (and therefore potentially more misleading) tone. The explanation why those particular 'two men ... did not work', for example, is given in W. H. Hudson's *The Naturalist in La Plata* (1892), where he says: 'The philosopher was astonished and amused at the reply, but

⁴⁰Darwin, *Diary*, pp.154-55.

⁴¹Darwin, *Journal*, pp.112-13. 'On the other hand, there is much blood shed, and many robberies committed.' (1839) has been reversed to 'On the other hand, many robberies are committed, and there is much blood shed' (1845) - (Browne & Neve, *Voyage*, pp.143-44).

⁴²Darwin, *Diary*, p.156.

failed to understand it. And yet, to one acquainted with these lovers of brief phrases, what more intelligible answer could have been returned? The poor fellow simply meant to say that his horses had been stolen ... or, perhaps, that some minion of the Government of the moment had seized them for the use of the State⁴³.

2/ **Indians.** While crossing the Argentinian Pampas, Darwin witnessed the early stages of the war of extermination being carried out against the Indians by General Rosas - and he therefore had a special interest in describing a way of life that was soon to disappear:

The next day three hundred men arrived from the Colorado ... A large portion of these men were Indians (*mansos*, or tame), belonging to the tribe of the Cacique Bernantio. They passed the night here; and it was impossible to conceive anything more wild and savage than the scene of their bivouac. Some drank till they were intoxicated; others swallowed the steaming blood of the cattle slaughtered for their suppers, and then, being sick from drunkenness, they cast it up again, and were besmeared with filth and gore.⁴⁴

These, admittedly, are Indians who have already been partially corrupted ('tame'): 'Not only have whole tribes been exterminated, but the remaining Indians have become more barbarous: instead of living in large villages, and being employed in the arts of fishing, as well as of the chase, they now wander about the open plains, without home or fixed occupation'⁴⁵. Their demeanour can still be admirable at times, however:

The three survivors [of a massacre] of course possessed very valuable information; and to extort this they were placed in a line. The two first being questioned, answered, 'No sé' (I do not know), and were one after the other shot. The third also said, 'No sé;' adding, 'Fire, I am a man, and can die!' Not one syllable would they breathe to injure the united cause of their country! The conduct of the ... cacique was very different: he saved his life by betraying the intended plan of warfare, and the point of union in

⁴³W. H. Hudson, *The Naturalist in La Plata* (London, 1912), p.351. (Information from Ruth Tomalin, *W. H. Hudson: A Biography* (Oxford, 1984), p.91).

⁴⁴Darwin, *Journal*, p.73.

⁴⁵Darwin, *Journal*, p.75.

the Andes.⁴⁶

This noble simplicity is matched by their appearance: 'They were remarkable fine men, very fair, above six feet high, and all under thirty years of age'. Of another group, Darwin says:

The taste they show in their dress is admirable; if you could turn one of these young Indians into a statue of bronze, the drapery would be perfectly graceful.⁴⁷

It is tempting to say that that is precisely what Darwin is doing - turning them into statues of bronze (as when he refers to a night encampment of gauchos and Indians as 'a Salvator Rosa scene'⁴⁸). For the moment, let us note the fine scorn heaped on the 'cacique', as opposed to his magnificent followers. This must be seen in the general context of Darwin's concentration on the 'picturesque' qualities of both Indians and gauchos - 'No painter ever imagined so wild a set of expressions'⁴⁹ - but it is perhaps as paintings and 'statues' that they are most easily interpreted by him.

3/ **Slaves and Estate-owners.** The theme of 'levelling' indignation expressed in the contrast between the cacique and his followers is echoed by the distinctions Darwin draws between slave-owners and their property.

While staying at this estate [near Rio de Janeiro], I was very nearly being an eye-witness to one of those atrocious acts which can only take place in a slave country. Owing to a quarrel and a lawsuit, the owner was on the point of taking all the women and children from the male slaves, and selling them separately at the public auction at Rio. Interest, and not any feeling of compassion, prevented this act. Indeed, I do not believe the inhumanity of separating thirty families, who had lived together for many years, even occurred to the owner. Yet I will pledge myself, that in humanity and good feeling he was superior to the common run of men. It may be said there exists no limit to the blindness of

⁴⁶Darwin, *Journal*, p.74.

⁴⁷Darwin, *Diary*, p.165.

⁴⁸Darwin, *Journal*, p.80.

⁴⁹Darwin, *Diary*, p.100.

interest and selfish habit.⁵⁰

And to emphasize the 'blindness of [that] selfish habit', Darwin has changed the icily polite 'person' in the first edition to a more indignant contrast between 'male slaves' and 'owner'. Darwin goes on to define his attitude towards the slaves:

I was crossing a ferry with a negro, who was uncommonly stupid. In endeavouring to make him understand, I talked loud, and made signs, in doing which I passed my hand near his face. He, I suppose, thought I was in a passion, and was going to strike him; for instantly, with a frightened look and half-shut eyes, he dropped his hands. I shall never forget my feelings of surprise, disgust, and shame, at seeing a great powerful man afraid even to ward off a blow, directed, as he thought, at his face. This man had been trained to a degradation lower than the slavery of the most helpless animal.⁵¹

One feels a certain contempt mingled here with the pity, and this extends to the landowners as well - despite their ready acceptance of him as part of their own class and caste.

At night we asked permission to sleep at an Estancia at which we happened to arrive. It was a very large estate ... & the owner at Buenos Ayres is one of the greatest landowners in the country. - His nephew has charge of it & with him there was a Captain of the army, who the other day ran away from Buenos Ayres. - Considering their station their conversation was rather amusing. They expressed, as was usual, unbounded astonishment at the globe being round, & could scarcely credit that a hole would if deep enough come out on the other side ... The Captain at last said, he had one question to ask me ... I trembled to think how deeply scientific it would be. - 'it was whether the ladies of Buenos Ayres were not the handsomest in the world'. I replied, 'Charmingly so'. He added, I have one other question - 'Do ladies in any other part of the world wear such large combs'. I solemnly assured him they did not. - They were absolutely delighted. - The Captain exclaimed, 'Look there, a man, who has seen half the world, says it is the case; we always thought so, but now we know it'. My excellent judgement in beauty procured me a most hospitable reception; the Captain forced me to take his bed, & he

⁵⁰Darwin, *Journal*, p.18. The phrase 'the male slaves' (1845) has replaced 'the men' (1839) in the second sentence. In the fourth, 'the person' (1839) has become 'the owner' (1845) - (Browne & Neve, *Voyage*, pp.62-63).

⁵¹Darwin, *Journal*, p.18.

would sleep on his Recado.⁵²

The reception might not have been quite so good if they could have read that entry in his *Journal*, however. Darwin tells such anecdotes without malice - and this one is amusing in itself - but his complacency about his own state of knowledge as compared with theirs is complete.

4/ **Patagonians.** This attitude *de haut en bas* becomes even more marked when he meets the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego:

I would not have believed how entire the difference between savage & civilized man is. - It is greater than between a wild & domesticated animal, in as much as in man there is greater power of improvement. - The chief spokesman was old & appeared to be head of the family; the three others were young powerful men & about 6 feet high. - From their dress &c &c they resembled the representations of Devils on the Stage, for instance in *Der Freischutz* ... Their language does not deserve to be called articulate: Capt. Cook says it is like a man clearing his throat; to which may be added another very hoarse man trying to shout & a third encouraging a horse with that peculiar noise which is made in one side of the mouth. - Imagine these sounds & a few gutturals mingled with them, & there will be as near an approximation to their language as any European may expect to obtain.⁵³

It is true that he toned down these remarks in the published *Journal*, adding that 'They are excellent mimics ... They could repeat with perfect correctness each word in any sentence we addressed them, and they remembered such words for some time'⁵⁴ - but even this is scarcely a tribute to their humanity. When they are not regarded as zoological specimens, they are seen as clowns:

The tallest amongst the Fuegians was evidently much pleased at his height being noticed ... He opened his mouth to show his teeth, and turned his face for a side view; and all this was done with such alacrity, that I daresay he thought himself the handsomest man in Tierra del Fuego. After our first feeling of grave astonishment was over, nothing could be more ludicrous than the odd mixture of surprise and imitation which these savages every moment

⁵²Darwin, *Diary*, p.202.

⁵³Darwin, *Diary*, pp.122-24.

⁵⁴Darwin, *Journal*, p.149.

exhibited.⁵⁵

No acknowledgement here of the fact that the crew's fascination with tallness was actually due to a peculiarly European absurdity: the legend of the Patagonian giants, surviving from the time of Magellan into the nineteenth century⁵⁶.

Brazilian Indians were thought by Montaigne to have important lessons to teach Europe and Europeans. The nineteenth century liberal Darwin, however, observes all these species of men as inferiors - at best, material for a case-study. A better way to look at it, perhaps, is not so much as an expression of Darwin's contempt for them as people, but rather as a sign of his too hasty categorization of them. These four sets of characters are, after all, as well-defined as the stock figures of *Commedia dell'Arte*; or, more to the point, like the stages of human development in a text-book. **The Estate-owner** might be seen, on one level, as Pantaloon - a well-meaning fool with more power than is good for him; on the other, as the king at the top of a feudal pyramid - the ignorant ruler of an ignorant race. **The Gaucho** is wild and free, yet courteous. His blood-thirstiness is as proverbial as his hospitality. We might see him as the *jeune premier*, Pierrot; or else as a throwback to the Heroic Age. **The Indian** is noble but inscrutable. We may corrupt him, but we can never fully understand him. He seems to represent the helpful beasts in fairy tales as much as, say, Chingachgook in the *Leatherstocking Tales*. Historically, of course, he is the Noble Savage. Finally, **the Patagonian** is the lowest of all - incapable of any social organization or cooperation outside the family unit; A sub-human troll or dwarf, who greets kindness with suspicion and scorn: a Caliban.

The whole thing might be written out as a table, using the terminology of both History and Romance:

1/ <i>The Estate-owner</i>	FEUDALISM (Pantaloon)
2/ <i>The Gaucho</i>	HEROIC AGE (Pierrot)
3/ <i>The Indian</i>	SAVAGERY (Chingachgook)
4/ <i>The Patagonian</i>	PRIMITIVISM (Caliban)

⁵⁵Darwin, *Journal*, p.151.

⁵⁶See Percy G. Adams, 'The Patagonian Giants or The Drama of the Dolphin', in *Travelers and Travel Liars: 1660-1800* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), pp.19-43.

In this context, it might be interesting to quote some remarks on the subject of American iconography from Sarmiento's *Facundo*:

El único romancista norteamericano que haya logrado hacerse un nombre europeo, es Fenimore Cooper, y eso, porque transportó la escena de sus descripciones fuera del círculo ocupado por los plantadores al límite entre la vida bárbara y la civilizada, al teatro de la guerra en que las razas indígenas y la raza sajona están combatiendo por la posesión del terreno.⁵⁷

He goes on to record his own impression, while reading '*El último de los Mohicanos*', that many of the indigenous customs recorded there were identical to those he had encountered on the Pampas. He concludes: 'modificaciones análogas del suelo traen análogas costumbres, recursos y expedientes. No es otra la razón de hallar en Fenimore Cooper descripciones de usos y costumbres que parecen plagiadas de la pampa'.⁵⁸

The point that I would like to make about Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) is not essentially dissimilar. It is not so much, in Darwin, that we see a set of 'usos y costumbres' held in common between North and South America - but a system of types which operates in the works of both Cooper and Darwin. Cooper's Romance anticipates the system of human levels adopted by Darwin's Travel Account; again, without plagiarism, but because 'modificaciones análogas ... traen análogas ... recursos y expedientes' (which one might paraphrase as 'similar [textual] needs call for similar solutions').

Let us examine this proposition in a little more detail. Pantaloon is replaced by Colonel Munro, the ineffectual Englishman (with the wayward daughter - remember 'whether the ladies of Buenos Ayres were not the handsomest in the world'?), Pierrot, the hero, is of course Natty Bumppo, 'Hawk-eye' - with his

⁵⁷Sarmiento, p.44: 'The only North American novelist who has gained a European reputation is Fenimore Cooper, and he succeeded in doing so by removing the scene of the events he described from the settled portion of the country to the border land between civilized life and that of the savage, the theatre of the war for the possession of the soil waged against each other, by the native tribes and the Saxon race.' (40).

⁵⁸Sarmiento, p.45: 'analogies in the soil bring with them analogous customs, resources, and expedients. This explains our finding in Cooper's works accounts of practices and customs which seem plagiarized from the pampa'. (41).

bewildering mixture of civility and savagery ('He is modest, both respecting himself and country, but at the same time a spirited, bold fellow. On the other hand, many robberies are committed, and there is much bloodshed'⁵⁹). Chingachgook, the last of the Mohicans, is self-explanatory: an embodiment of the mystery of the woods and of nature ('The third also said ... 'Fire, I am a man, and can die!' Not one syllable would they breathe to injure the united cause of their country!'). Finally, his enemies, the Hurons (as well as the treacherous Magua) represent the dark side of ignorance and barbarism - a predominant theme in American Gothic - ('Matthews [the missionary left with the Fuegians] described the watch he was obliged always to keep as most harassing; night and day he was surrounded by the natives, who tried to tire him out by making an incessant noise close to his head. One day an old man, whom Matthews asked to leave his wigwam, immediately returned with a large stone in his hand; another day a whole party came armed with stones and stakes ... Another party showed by signs that they wished to strip him naked, and pluck all the hairs out of his face and body. I think we arrived just in time to save his life'⁶⁰). Darwin can afford to mock the Patagonians a little more than Cooper his Indians because they represent no peril to him. Natty and his companions, however, are in the position of Matthews - at the mercy of creatures who have to 'show by signs' even so basic a concept as murder.

As with Sarmiento's list of customs common to Cooper's Indians and the gaucho, I do not mean to imply that this was a conscious intention on Darwin's part - or even one that he would have recognized in his own work. The point is rather that the hierarchies of characterization he creates in his Beagle narrative - most of which stem from an attitude of superiority; the god-like contempt of a creator for his work - communicate in terms of already accepted conventions to his readers. It is they therefore, as much as Darwin, who seize upon such satisfactory systems of ranking to explain and assimilate another part of the earth's

⁵⁹Darwin, Journal, pp.112-13.

⁶⁰Darwin, Journal, p.163. This whole passage was added in the 1845 edition. 1839 has merely, 'Captain FitzRoy has given an account of all the interesting events which there happened.' - (Browne & Neve, Voyage, p.182).

surface. A region, what is more, so alien - so permanently novel - that it retains the title of the New World more than 300 years after its discovery. If Darwin is a Romancer, it is unconsciously - but this is not to say that his work cannot communicate to others in the language of Romance.

3.3.2 The Cordillera

When we reached the crest & looked backwards, a glorious view was presented. The atmosphere so resplendently clear, the sky an intense blue, the profound valleys, the wild broken forms, the heaps of ruins piled up during the lapse of ages, the bright colored rocks, contrasted with the quiet mountains of Snow, together produced a scene I never could have imagined. Neither plant or bird, excepting a few condors wheeling around the higher pinnacles, distracted the attention from the inanimate mass. - I felt glad I was by myself, it was like watching a thunderstorm, or hearing in the full Orchestra a Chorus of the Messiah.⁶¹

It seems that with this extract we come full circle in our discussion of Darwin. His reaction to the wildness of the Mountains is as sure a manifestation of Romantic 'sensitivity' (in Jane Austen's sense) as any in Wordsworth. And Wordsworth would no doubt have appreciated his attempt to define what he saw in terms of the contrasting elements that composed it: 'bright colored rocks' against 'mountains of Snow, together produced ...' something that excelled his own 'fancy', or imagination.

Once again, he is following Humboldt's example - but this time with a subtle difference. Humboldt, a good Enlightenment man, reacts with more horror than wonder to the heights:

Our short stay at that extreme altitude was very dismal; mist (brume) enveloped us and only now and again revealed the terrible chasms which surrounded us; no living thing was to be seen and tiny mosses were the only organic things which reminded us that we were still on an inhabited planet.⁶²

Darwin at first dutifully follows suit: 'In the deep ravines the death-like scene of desolation exceeds all description. It was blowing a gale of wind, but not a breath stirred the leaves of the highest trees; everything was dripping with water; even the very Fungi could not flourish' - but soon a sense of Romantic exaltation overtakes him:

Here was a true Tierra del Fuego view; irregular chains of hills, mottled with patches of snow; deep yellowish-green valleys, &

⁶¹Darwin, *Diary*, p.309.

⁶²Humboldt: 1769/1969, p.145.

arms of the sea running in all directions; the atmosphere was not however clear, & indeed the strong wind was so piercingly cold, that it would prevent much enjoyment under any circumstances.⁶³

Too cold, certainly - and the air not sufficiently clear - but one feels an exuberance in that 'a true Tierra del Fuego view' which is lacking in Humboldt's remarks. It is not so much that Darwin is always enthusiastic about what he sees, as that he seems to be in a state of continual awe at it:

Everything in this southern continent has been effected on a grand scale⁶⁴.

An awe analogous, perhaps, with that with which he contemplated 'that mystery of mysteries', the origin of species on this earth.⁶⁵

To express this feeling, he has recourse to various techniques. The most obvious of these, as we have already seen, is making reference to works of art. We have heard him compare the sight of a mountain range with 'hearing in the full Orchestra a Chorus of the Messiah.' Likewise, in one of his evocations of the Patagonian plain, he quotes from Shelley's 'Mont Blanc':

There was not a tree, and excepting the guanaco ... scarcely an animal or a bird. All was stillness and desolation. Yet in passing over these scenes, without one bright object near, an ill-defined but strong sense of pleasure is vividly excited. One asked how many ages the plain had thus lasted, and how many more it was doomed thus to continue.

None can reply - all seems eternal now.
The wilderness has a mysterious tongue,
Which teaches awful doubt.⁶⁶

The poetry seems here for sensuous impact rather than sense, which leads one to see much of the rest of the passage, too, as an attempt to re-create the sensation of 'visionary dreariness' familiar to us from Wordsworth's *Prelude*.

⁶³Darwin, *Diary*, p.219.

⁶⁴Darwin, *Journal*, p.124.

⁶⁵Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, sixth edition (London, 1911), p.1.

⁶⁶Darwin, *Journal*, p.122.

Nor is this technique employed merely for the highs, the mountain slopes, of Darwin's experience. He says of one landscape: 'The entangled mass of the thriving and the fallen reminded me of the forests within the tropics - yet there was a difference: for in these still solitudes, Death, instead of Life, seemed the predominant spirit'⁶⁷. 'Death' and 'Life' are poetic, almost allegorical personifications hardly to be expected in a sober traveller's account. Darwin, the Romantic writer, is however as fascinated with darkness as with light - as in his comparison of the gauchos at camp with a 'Salvator Rosa scene'; or the Latin tag which follows the scene of the Indian's feast, 'besmeared with filth and gore'. The Patagonians, too, are like Devils in 'Der Freischutz'. If one were to characterize the entire view of South America presented by him, one could do no better than his remark:

The theatre is worthy of the scenes acted on it.⁶⁸

An appropriately artificial metaphor to sum up this aspect of his work.

Darwin's voyage, then, represents a progression: a progression from imagination to reality - and from reality, through various layers of textuality, to Art - but also a narrative progression from the forests of Brazil, through the embattled plains of Argentina, to the heights of the Andes. The first of these stages is marked by an extreme dependence on precedent - both textual (in the form of Humboldt's writings), and personal (sticking close to the ship, and not undertaking many expeditions inland). The genre here is Naturalist's Diary pure and simple - with each entry blending narrative, generalization, and Scientific detail: the three categories exemplified by Humboldt's *Personal Narrative*.

In Argentina, Darwin became more independent. Circumstances allowed him to roam more widely, but it was he who acted upon the opportunity. His view of men and their foibles becomes more Olympian - the human categories of South

⁶⁷Darwin, *Journal*, p.152. It is interesting to note that in the *Diary* entry corresponding to this, 'death instead of life' is written without this distinctive capitalization - evidence of a conscious intention on Darwin's part in accentuating them in both editions of the *Journal*. (Darwin, *Diary*, p.126).

⁶⁸Darwin, *Journal*, p.136.

America become a sort of cross-section of characters from Romance: Savages, foolish Aristocrats, Heroes, and ignoble Primitives.

In Chile his genre mutates again. Alone, now, he contemplates the universe and attempts to echo its effect on him by the loftiness of his aspirations ('to add a few facts to the great mass of facts in natural science'). Just as Wordsworth saw in Newton a kindred spirit, 'Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone', so Darwin finds in Shelley and Handel the appropriate models for his state of mind.

The journey, of course, continued - out across the Pacific: to the Galapagos Islands (most commonly associated with his name); to Tahiti; New Zealand; New South Wales; and finally home - but the main body of the epic is set in South America, and it is in the attempt to re-create South America that he ranged across the myriad styles that together make an epic: from the homely, the anecdotal - to the heroic and warlike - to the sublimity of the elemental forces of nature. If the *Voyage of the Beagle* is, on the one hand, a Romance; it is also a primary epic - one, like Homer, that accretes over time. For secondary, self-conscious epic, one must turn to *Moby Dick* (1851), *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), and *Arthur Gordon Pym*.

In the next chapter, too, we shall be examining such questions of narrative coherence, and the shaping of experience associated with the allegedly 'objective' genres of Historiography and Scientific Naturalism. Only after that will it be possible for us to consider in their full ramifications the overtly fictional accounts of 'South America' (Hudson, Conrad, Masefield), which are, after all, the principal concern of this study.

Chapter 4

Graham and the Historians

History never repeats itself. The historians repeat each other.
There is a wide difference.

- Oscar Wilde¹.

4.1 Antonio Conselheiro

El hombre era alto y tan flaco que parecía siempre de perfil. Su piel era oscura, sus huesos prominentes y sus ojos ardían con fuego perpetuo. Calzaba sandalias de pastor y la túnica morada que le caía sobre el cuerpo recordaba el hábito de esos misioneros que, de cuando en cuando, visitaban los pueblos del sertón bautizando muchedumbres de niños y casando a las parejas amancebadas. Era imposible saber su edad, su procedencia, su historia, pero algo había en su facha tranquila, en sus costumbres frugales, en su imperturbable seriedad que, aun antes de que diera consejos, atraía a las gentes.²

'The man' is Antonio Vicente Mendes Maciel - better known as Antonio Conselheiro (Antonio the Counselor) - and the 'backlands' region in question is the *Sertão* in the arid North-east of Brazil. Compare, however, this rather sympathetic description with the following passage from R. B. Cunninghame Graham's biography of the same person, *A Brazilian Mystic* (1920):

he was an unconscious Montanist, or perhaps a Carpocratian, preserved miraculously, just as a mammoth is occasionally found preserved in ice, in the Siberian wilds. Nature, it would appear, is indestructible, preserving prehistoric forms and follies intact for us to wonder at, to imitate and copy, and to perpetuate, so that no

¹Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London, 1987), p.102.

²Mario Vargas Llosa, *La guerra del fin del mundo* (Barcelona, 1981), p.15: 'The man was tall and so thin he seemed to be always in profile. He was dark-skinned and rawboned, and his eyes burned with perpetual fire. He wore shepherd's sandals and the dark purple tunic draped over his body called to mind the cassocks of those missionaries who every so often visited the villages of the backlands, baptizing hordes of children and marrying men and women who were cohabiting. It was impossible to learn what his age, his background, his life story were, but there was something about his quiet manner, his frugal habits, his imperturbable gravity that attracted people even before he offered counsel.' (translations quoted from Mario Vargas Llosa, *The War of the End of the World*, translated by Helen R. Lane (London, 1986) - page numbers thus (3)).

form of man's ineptitude shall ever perish, or be rendered unavailable for fools to promulgate.³

He was, in other words, a mystic - with beliefs along the lines of some of the 'Gnostic sects in Asia Minor in the first and second centuries'⁴. Sufficient cause therefore, apparently, for an eruption of Voltairean scorn on Graham's part.

As if this were not enough, let us look at yet another reading of him - this time from Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902), the standard account:

A species of great man gone wrong, Antonio Conselheiro in his sorrowing mysticism brought together all those errors and superstitions which go to form the coefficient of reduction of our nationality.⁵

Which, then, are we to accept? Antonio Conselheiro as the itinerant preacher whose 'quiet manner ... attracted people even before he offered counsel'; as a mammoth frozen in ice, whose mere existence proves the indestructibility of every 'form of man's ineptitude'; or as a kind of quintessence of all the bad features of Brazilian nationality? From the point of view of this study, it will probably be found more profitable to leave aside the question of disinterested historical veracity, and ask ourselves rather what we can learn about these three authors from the form of their remarks.

In her article 'Santos and Cangaceiros: Inscription without Discourse in *Os Sertões* and *La guerra del fin del mundo*', Sara Castro-Klarén notes:

For the first time this master storyteller [Mario Vargas Llosa] is attempting to get a direct grip on the history of Latin America, and he finds that in order to write historical novels one must have a theory of history.⁶

Her own argument hinges on the failure of either Euclides da Cunha or Vargas

³R. B. Cunninghame Graham, *A Brazilian Mystic: Being the Life and Miracles of Antonio Conselheiro* (London, 1920), p.84.

⁴Graham, *Mystic*, p.3.

⁵Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands (Os Sertões)*, translated by Samuel Putnam (Chicago and London, 1944), p.140.

⁶*Modern Language Notes*, 101 (1986), 366-88 (p.382).

Llosa (or even Cunninghame Graham, whom she mentions in passing) to succeed in providing a field of discourse for the 'mystic' at the heart of the Canudos campaign, Antonio Conselheiro. In order to make sense of these and subsequent remarks, however, it will be necessary to provide some summary of the conflict in question - since even the most resolute historicizer is to some extent bound by the shape of the events he reports.

Antonio Conselheiro first began to attract attention in the late 1870s, when a traveller in the *Sertão* reported his influence thus:

Accompanied by a couple of women followers, he lives by reciting beads and litanies, by preaching, and by giving counsel to the multitudes that come to hear him when the local Church authorities permit it. Appealing to their religious sentiments, he draws them after him in throngs and moves them at his will. He gives evidence of being an intelligent man, but an uncultivated one.⁷

All that was known of him then was that he was the offspring of a family, the Maciels, which had been devastated by one of the Corsican-style vendettas endemic to the region; and that he had spent ten years in the wilderness after having the course of his life as a book-keeper disrupted by his wife's adulteries (the immediate cause of his flight was the attack he made on one of her seducer's cousins). The staples of backland life - revenge and betrayal - thus surrounded his life 'in the world'. Ever since his return, however, he had done nothing but good - travelling through the backlands (at first alone but later with a group of followers), repairing churches and cemeteries, and giving 'counsels' to the poor.

In 1893, in a small town called (rather appropriately) Bom Conselho, Antonio Conselheiro was shown some notices recently posted by municipal officials throughout the region. These notices concerned the collection of taxes, and the organization of a census for this purpose. Giving voice to the suspicions of those who surrounded him, he at once declared that this was a plot on the part of the forces of the Republic (which had succeeded the Empire in 1889) to reintroduce slavery (abolished by Emperor Dom Pedro II in 1888) and begin the persecution

⁷Quoted in da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.130.

of true believers throughout Brazil. He tore the notices down, 'Then,' (as Euclides da Cunha puts it) 'realizing the gravity of his offense, he left town, taking the Monte Santo Road, to the north'⁸.

What da Cunha refers to as his 'hegira'⁹ came to an end when he reached the small settlement of Canudos and established there his own *Civitas Dei*, the 'mud-walled Troy of the jagunços'¹⁰. The Government in the South were too concerned with quashing dissension at home to notice events in the traditionally neglected North-east, so Canudos was quite a thriving town when it next attracted attention - in 1896, when the chief magistrate of the Joazeiro District telegraphed the Governor of Bahía, asking for protection against the jagunços, who were threatening to take revenge on a local merchant who had cheated them.

There were, all in all, four military expeditions against Canudos. The first consisted of 100 troops, and was routed before it even reached the town. The second was larger, 560 men, but it too was defeated in a series of battles in January 1897. The third comprised an entire regiment, under the command of the war hero Moreira Cesar, but he and most of his force were killed in a frontal assault on Canudos in March. The fourth and final expedition was in two columns, each of 2,000 men - nevertheless, it took them from June until September, with periodic heavy reinforcements, to capture the town. Da Cunha, again, summarizes:

Canudos did not surrender. The only case of its kind in history, it held out to the last man. Conquered inch by inch, in the literal meaning of the words, it fell on October 5, toward dusk - when its last defenders fell, dying, every man of them. There were only four of them left: an old man, two other full-grown men, and a child, facing a furiously raging army of five thousand soldiers.¹¹

⁸da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.142.

⁹da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.142.

¹⁰da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.143. The 'name of *jagunço*', which came to be the generic term for a follower of Antonio Conselheiro, is defined by da Cunha as 'the name which up to then had been reserved for rowdies at the fair, bullies on election day, and the pillagers of cities'. (*Rebellion*, p.148).

¹¹da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.475.

It is this defence which Samuel Putnam, in an interesting aside to his 1944 translation, compared to the 'contemporary epic of Stalingrad'¹².

Antonio Conselheiro was already dead. He had collapsed and died of dysentery on September the 22nd. The victorious forces of the Republic tortured his closest disciple, 'Pious Anthony' (who had been captured a few days before) until he showed them the site of the grave. The corpse was first disinterred, then photographed, and finally decapitated so that it could be examined for signs of 'crime and madness'¹³ by the phrenologists in the capital. Antonio Beatinho, like all the other male prisoners, had his throat slit on the spot.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine three different 'readings' of the man, Antonio Conselheiro, and the war of which he was the effective cause. We have already seen something of the inevitable change of focus required simply by the historical circumstances of our three authors - not to mention their 'theories of history'. All of them see Antonio Conselheiro as in some way exemplary - but of different things. For the Brazilian eye-witness da Cunha, he exemplifies the degeneracy and barbarism of his 'uncivilized' contemporaries (though he combines this with a certain admiration, not unlike Sarmiento's attitude towards the gauchos). For Mario Vargas Llosa, he represents the challenge to reconstitute 'La visión de los vencidos [que] es totalmente desconocida, en primer lugar porque no hubo entre ellos ningún testigo que llegase a escribirla', but also 'porque lo que sobre todo se conoce objetivamente es la historia oficial'¹⁴. As for Cunninghame Graham, his position as an outsider ought to qualify him to see the event in wider terms - but in fact, paradoxically (as we shall see), it is the European who is most resolutely 'South American' in his interpretation.

¹²Samuel Putnam, "'Brazil's Greatest Book": A Translator's Introduction', in da Cunha, *Rebellion*, pp.iii-xviii (p.v).

¹³da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.476.

¹⁴From Vargas Llosa's 1979 interview with José Miguel Oviedo, 'La historia de la historia: conversación en Lima', quoted in Castro-Klaren, 'Santos and Cangaceiros', p.382: 'The vision of the conquered [which] goes entirely unrecognized, in the first place because there were no witnesses among them who were able to write it down ... [but also] because all that we tend to know for certain is the official version'. (my translation).

This part of our study ought, therefore, to be a test-case for both the chronological and generic distinctions introduced in the last two chapters. On the one hand we have a 'synchronic section' focussed on Cunninghame Graham's book, published in 1920, which takes Euclides da Cunha's account (1901) and Mario Vargas Llosa's novel (1981) as the two poles of its 'strategic location'. Its 'strategic formation' ('how each work obeys the constraints of its particular [generic] function', to quote from Chapter Two above), must consequently be defined before we can examine the particular version of 'South America' which it provides.

I shall therefore close this first, expository section with another quotation from Cunninghame Graham which, when compared with da Cunha's description, demonstrates the diverse ways in which one can interpret even so simple an event as the finding of a body:

His face was calm, his body almost mere skin and bones, worn out with fasting and with the death of his illusions, but his soul unconquerable.

... Some of the faithful had placed some withered flowers upon his breast. His body lay upon a ragged piece of matting, and both his eyes were full of sand.¹⁵

¹⁵Graham, *Mystic*, pp.233 & 238.

4.2 The Historians

4.2.1 Euclides da Cunha

Euclides da Cunha, the author of the first comprehensive account of the Canudos campaign, himself accompanied the fourth expedition as a reporter for the *Estado de São Paulo*. He was thirty years old at the time, and had already tried several careers - the army, journalism, and civil engineering - all of which contributed to the form of *Os Sertões*, which took him five years to write. As Putnam puts it:

From 1898 to 1902 he was engaged, simultaneously, in building a bridge and in writing his masterpiece, and the two were completed at one and the same time. Directing the work of construction by day, at night he labored on the curious, rough-hewn architecture of his prose.¹⁶

The nature of the book is perhaps best conveyed by saying that it is a combination of genres. As a working journalist, da Cunha was of course interested in giving his readers an action-packed, but 'factual'¹⁷ account of the events of the campaign - and this he provides in the eight chapters of Part II: 'The Rebellion'.

As a scientist (he had studied at both a Polytechnic and a Liberal Arts College, and was a trained engineer), he was interested in accounting for the causes of this rebellion from the ground (literally) up. In Part I of his book: 'The Backlands', he devotes 50 pages to an account of the geology, soil types, climate, and vegetation of the *Sertão*, and then goes on to anatomize its inhabitants in a further 120 pages. Beginning with general reflections on the race 'problem' (i.e. miscegenation) in Brazil, he goes on to describe the particular mixtures of races to

¹⁶da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.xvii.

¹⁷His newspaper articles from Canudos have been collected in Euclides da Cunha, *Canudos: Diário de uma expedição*, edited by Gilberto Freyre, *Documentos brasileiros*, 16 (Rio de Janeiro, 1939). I highlight the word 'factual' because of the tendency of journalistic prose to give lavish circumstantial detail of dates and names in order to establish the authority of the account as a whole and downplay any (inevitable) bias in its reporting.

be found in the Backlands (Negro and Indian producing the *cafuso*; Negro and White producing the *mulatto*; and Indian and White producing the *curiboca*, or *mameluco* - also used as a generic term for all people of mixed blood¹⁸). This leads him to speculate on the 'reflection of environment in history'¹⁹ - with reference to the first settlers in the area, the Portuguese, then the Jesuits, the Mulattoes, and finally their descendants, the jagunços. We are given an epitome of the culture of the *Sertanejo*, or Backlander - his prowess on horseback (even more impressive, because of the rougher conditions of the bush-clad *Sertão*, than that of Sarmiento's gauchos to the South), his ability as an improviser and bard, his sufferings in times of drought, and finally his religious extremism. Da Cunha concludes as follows:

The man of the backlands, as may be seen from the sketch we have given of him, more than any other, stands in a functional relation to the earth. He is a variable, dependent on the play of the elements. Out of a consciousness of his own weakness in warding off those elements is born the strong and constant impulse to fall back upon the miraculous, representing the inferior mental state of the backward individual who feels himself the ward of divinity.²⁰

This quotation should be enough to give some flavour of da Cunha's scientific reductionism. The 'impulse to fall back on the miraculous' naturally must come from an 'inferior mental state' - how else is it to be accounted for in a world which is rapidly succumbing to the analytical force of nineteenth century Determinism? Da Cunha's racial theories, too, are offensive to a post-colonial reader (though they actually represent a softening of the extreme positions of *savants* such as Lombroso or Gumplowicz²¹).

Other genres which influenced da Cunha include the novel (the book has been described as 'a great document, which, though not a novel, reads like

¹⁸da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.52.

¹⁹da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.62.

²⁰da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.112.

²¹See da Cunha, *Rebellion*, pp.84-88.

fiction'²² - a somewhat disingenuous tribute), an aspect discernible in passages such as the Dostoyevskian analysis of the character of Colonel Moreira Cesar in the fifth chapter:

All the strange things that he had done in the course of his incoherent life were now seen to be warning symptoms, which could point to but one unmistakable diagnosis.²³

Da Cunha had been a lyric poet in his youth, and this undoubtedly helped him in shaping the 'epic' of *Os Sertões*. As Samuel Putnam remarks, the experience of reading da Cunha 'is comparable in quality to that of the European of the last century listening for the first time to Walt Whitman's "barbaric yawp."' 'The comparison', he goes on to say, 'is a particularly valid one on the side of form and style'²⁴. As a former lieutenant in the army, he also feels himself to be an authority on strategy and tactics, and does not hesitate to castigate the shortcomings of the senior officers who commanded the various expeditions.

Finally, da Cunha was a philosopher of some distinction, and in fact lectured on logic at the Pedro II Institute in the last year of his life (1909). This aspect can be noted not only in his lofty view of history and causality - the rather Schopenhauer-like tone of his caustic remarks about the 'vision' of the overall commander of the expedition, Marshall Bittencourt, who talked 'as if this world were one huge barracks and History merely a variation on a sergeant's records'²⁵; but also in his ability to distance himself from the passions of the moment and see things from the perspective of his opponents:

what had they [the soldiers] achieved by ten months of fighting and one hundred days of incessant cannonading; of what profit to them those heaps of ruins ... that clutter of broken images, fallen altars, shattered saints - and all this beneath a bright and tranquil

²²Quoted in da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.v.

²³da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.233. The 'diagnosis' in question is, appropriately, epilepsy: 'It may accordingly be said, without any exaggeration, that a crime or a rare burst of heroism is often but the mechanical equivalent of an attack.'

²⁴da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.viii.

²⁵da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.395.

sky which seemingly was quite unconcerned with it all, as they pursued their flaming ideal of absolutely extinguishing a form of religious belief that was deeply rooted and which brought consolation to their fellow-beings?²⁶

Given this multiplicity of *personae*, it is scarcely surprising to find so much of a contrast here to his earlier remarks on the 'inferior mental state of the backward individual who feels himself the ward of divinity'. He himself made the admission (replying to one of his critics) that 'in this mortal leap - 616 minus 70 equals 546 pages - one might expect to meet with a few seeming discrepancies'²⁷; but the fact of the matter is that these 'seeming discrepancies' in his work - his wildly divergent attitudes to the army and the jagunços depending on which 'character' (scientist, soldier, poet or journalist) he is speaking in - are part and parcel of the method of composition he has chosen to adopt. That this choice was a deliberate one can be deduced both from his own remarks²⁸, and from the extraordinary care with which it is constructed - each section being told in the way which most closely echoes the events being recounted. There is a section of quoted diary at one point²⁹, for instance, to give the impression of the 'alarums and excursions' which accompanied that whole period of the siege; and a lengthy passage (reminiscent of Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895)) in the same chapter which chronicles the anabasis of the wounded soldiers from Canudos to Monte Santo.

Castro-Klarén has stated that:

Modernity in the nineteenth century in Latin America was synonymous with science. The ultimate model for the Latin American *pensador* and novelist was the scientist, and scientific (or pseudo-scientific) observation dominated the discourse of those subjects who [*sic*] pretended to knowledge. The arrogance of science, tempered after World War I, is transformed into the

²⁶da Cunha, Rebellion, p.464.

²⁷da Cunha, Rebellion, p.481. (The reference is to the page numbers in the first Brazilian edition).

²⁸this book, which originally set out to be a history of the Canudos Campaign, subsequently lost its timeliness when ... its publication was deferred. We have accordingly given it another form ...' (da Cunha, Rebellion, p.xxix.).

²⁹da Cunha, Rebellion, pp.369-72.

relativity of a human science and of this the favourite posture of the Latin American *pensador* becomes the anthropological stance.³⁰

Euclides da Cunha died too soon to experience World War I, but the Canudos campaign might be seen as an equally traumatic event in his life - even if not in those of his readers. His work, therefore, seems to be influenced equally by the 'scientific (or pseudo-scientific)' stance affected by nineteenth-century '*pensadores*' and the 'anthropological' position characteristic of his successors. Seen as a 'novelistic' account, the narrative is too clogged with detail and intellectual excursions. As a scientific treatise, it must be seen as flawed by the contradictions of tone and attitude which constitute much of its interest as a human document. If one were to seek one description that reconciles these eccentricities of form and content - and justifies da Cunha's quoting Taine's dictum about the honest narrator who wants to '*sentir en barbare, parmi les barbares, et, parmi les anciens, en ancien*'³¹ - one might do worse than an 'anthropological history'³².

³⁰Castro-Klarén, 'Santos and Cangaceiros', p.383.

³¹da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.xxx: 'feel like a barbarian among the barbarians, and an ancient among the ancients'. (my translation).

³²The nearest precedent in Latin America is Sarmiento's *Facundo*, of which José Pablo Feinmann has commented:

¿Es una novela, un ensayo histórico, sociológico, filosófico, es una bibliografía, un panfleto político? Es todo esto. Y lo es porque es la expresión totalizadora de una práctica política diferenciada. Es la construcción de una verdad.

(Quoted in Castro-Klarén, 'Santos and Cangaceiros', p.369: 'Is it a novel or an essay? - if an essay, is it historical, sociological or philosophical? - is it a bibliography? or a political pamphlet? It is all of these. This is because it is the complete expression of a flexible and pragmatic politics. It constructs its own truth.' (my translation)).

4.2.2 R. B. Cunninghame Graham

A short introduction to the man is still, perhaps, required. In Chesterton's famous remark about him, 'Nothing could prevent Balfour being Prime Minister or MacDonald being a Prime Minister, but Cunninghame Graham achieved the adventure of being Cunninghame Graham'³³. Even now, Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham is a figure who inspires either enthusiasm or exasperation - never apathy. To an admirer who described him as a poet and a gaucho, he replied, 'more gaucho than poet'³⁴, and this was an essential part of his legend. As George Bernard Shaw put it, in the preface to his play based on Graham's Moroccan adventures, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1900):

His tales of adventure have the true Cervantes touch of the man who has been there - so refreshingly different from the scenes imagined by bloody-minded clerks who escape from their servitude into literature ... He is, I understand, a Spanish hidalgo ... He is, I know, a Scottish laird. How he contrives to be authentically the two things at the same time is no more intelligible to me than the fact that everything that has ever happened to him seems to have happened in Paraguay or Texas instead of in Spain or Scotland.³⁵

At his best, his writings combine these two qualities of poet and man of action in a manner which contrives to illuminate both³⁶; unfortunately, this is by no means all of the time. He himself confessed, in the preface to the last collection of his sketches: 'But still I might have finished all those sentences; not broken off to moralize right in the middle of the tale; split less infinitives, and remembered those rules of grammar that I have disregarded, as freely as a democratic leader

³³Quoted in Tschiffely, *Don Roberto*, p.189.

³⁴*The South American Sketches of R. B. Cunninghame Graham*, edited by John Walker (Norman, Oklahoma, 1978), p.4.

³⁵Quoted in *Cunninghame Graham: A Critical Biography*, by Cedric Watts and Laurence Davies (Cambridge, 1979), p.133.

³⁶In Shaw's words, 'He handles the other lethal weapons as familiarly as the pen: medieval sword and modern Mauser are to him as umbrellas and kodaks are to me.' (*Cunninghame Graham*, p.133).

tramps on the rights of the poor taxables who put him into power³⁷ (thus repeating the very fault for which he is apologizing). A certain rationale for the interplay between these two roles has been supplied by his biographers, Cedric Watts and Laurence Davies:

The point that should be made is this: Robert's South American exploits [in the 1870s and 1880s] stocked his brain with remembered situations and remembered sensations for the rest of his life. The memories stay relatively constant; what changes is their significance ... what comes through is sometimes the absurdity, sometimes the savagery, sometimes the boredom and discomfort of events³⁸.

Cunninghame Graham's opinions - whether on politics (radical), imperialism (anti-), or literature (he championed both Hudson and Conrad before it was fashionable to do so) - are, in short, always worth taking seriously; but they are not consistent either internally or chronologically. To some extent this is because the essence of his philosophy was to be free and unpredictable³⁹ - but it had the unfortunate side-effect of allowing him to lapse into reactionary and even (occasionally) racist⁴⁰ attitudes in his later writings.

The later Graham depends more on literary stock-responses; often, where formerly his religious scepticism had been prominent, there is now a recurrent indulgence in religious reverie⁴¹.

³⁷R. B. Cunninghame Graham, 'To the Incurious Reader', in Rodeo: A Collection of the Tales and Sketches of R. B. Cunninghame Graham, selected by A. F. Tschiffely (London, 1936), pp.xv-xx (p.xvi).

³⁸Cunninghame Graham, p.32.

³⁹He remarked of W. H. Hudson: 'Nothing was more intolerable to [him] than a Utopia, as it must ever be to all artistic minds. Rather the freedom of the wilds, than a society, where there is no folly, sorrow or no crime.' - quoted in Cunninghame Graham, p.267.

⁴⁰Watts and Davies record a lapse into what they call 'uncharacteristic anti-Semitism' in a 1920 letter, precisely contemporaneous with A Brazilian Mystic, to the Scottish Home Rule Association: 'Graham says that though he has "of course no idea of imputing complicity in murder to the Jews as a race", he believes that "these murders [of Black and Tans in Ireland] are instigated chiefly & certainly paid for by the band of international Jews, grouped around their fellow Jew, Mr. 'De' Valera in New York".' - Cunninghame Graham, p.250.

⁴¹Cunninghame Graham, p.282.

The truth of this statement by Watts and Davies can be illustrated by a simple comparison of the two passages from *A Brazilian Mystic* already quoted in Section 1 above. In the first, a certain 'Voltairean scorn' is apparent (as I noted at the time). In the second, a kind of sentimental transformation has taken place - the brutal scene of decapitation and disfigurement from *Os Sertões* has been replaced by what Watts and Davies, in their discussion of the book, call 'Graham's gentler, more elegiac and plangent version'⁴². To examine the consequences of these mutually contradictory views of the same set of events, it will be necessary to go deeper into the genesis of this, in their judgement 'certainly the best of Graham's historical biographies'⁴³.

Graham had, as was mentioned above, travelled extensively in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and the South-west of the United States, so it was quite understandable that Theodore Roosevelt should write him the letter quoted in the preface to *A Brazilian Mystic*:

'What you and Hudson have done for South America, many have done for our frontiersmen in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. Others have written of the Mexican frontiersmen, and written well about them. No one, as far as I know,' so he said, 'has touched the subject of the frontiersmen of Brazil. Why don't you do it? for you have been there, know them, and speak their lingo. The field is open to you.'⁴⁴

Graham caps off this extract from the letter with an anecdote about his last visit to Brazil during the war, when he first found out about the story of Canudos, in order to justify choosing it as just such an illustration of the character of life in the backlands.

Graham's declared intention as the historian of Antonio Conselheiro and Canudos - first, to interpret the character of the region to his own countrymen (hence his quoting the Trossachs 'as an equivalent' for *Sertão*, 'for it is said to

⁴²Cunninghame Graham, p.278.

⁴³Cunninghame Graham, p.275.

⁴⁴Graham, *Mystic*, p.vii.

mean a broken land of hillocks⁴⁵); and second, to include it in the generalized vendetta against human folly and self-deception (either the folly of 'progress', as in the sketch of that name; or the folly of fanaticism: the Counsellor and his followers) which he had been conducting since he first entered politics as a radical M.P. in 1886 - is thus somewhat compromised from the first. Theodore Roosevelt was, after all, the very man who had engineered the Panamanian 'revolution' of 3 November 1903, which brought about its independence from Colombia (and, incidentally, safeguarded American rights in the canal zone). As Joseph Conrad, then in the midst of planning *Nostromo*, wrote to Graham at the time: 'à propos what do you think of the Yankee Conquistadores in Panama? Pretty, isn't it?'⁴⁶. Graham's fierce polemical stance (expressed in anti-imperialist sketches like 'Niggers' (1897)) had been somewhat softened by America's intervention in the First World War - significantly, it was while buying horses for the British army in France that he first heard about Canudos - but one cannot help feeling that this confusion of stances has something to do with an ideological incoherence at the heart of the work itself.

Presumably the letter and the anecdote did indeed provide Graham's motivation for undertaking the project, but they combine to give a false impression of the genesis of his book. Graham has compounded this by attempting throughout to imply that he is relying on a number of source books, rather than directly on Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*⁴⁷. Again, this is probably true as far as it goes - and Graham did have genuine experience of the region to draw on - but a close comparison of the two texts reveals again and again his dependence on the earlier book not simply for the historical details mentioned, but even for apparently 'spontaneous' opinions about Antonio Conselheiro's kinship with the first century Gnostics, and the racial implications of the conflict.

⁴⁵R. B. Cunninghame Graham, 'Explanatory Preface', in Gustavo Barroso, *Mapirunga*, translated by R. B. Cunninghame Graham (London, 1924), pp.5-14 (p.6).

⁴⁶Joseph Conrad's *Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham*, edited by C. T. Watts (Cambridge, 1969), p.149.

⁴⁷'I listened to the story [from 'my friend Bracerias'], and, when we landed at the capital, bought books about it, bought more in Santos, and as I read and mused upon the tale, the letter from the President came back into my mind.' - Graham, *Mystic*, pp.ix-x.

Graham's history re-orders the material into a biography, rather than a history of the campaign, but the main result of this is merely to force him to pad out his actual information with many more-or-less irrelevant descriptive passages.

This (deliberately veiled) dependence on da Cunha also has unfortunate consequences for the book's ideological tone. If he had written it before the war - at the time of 'Progress' (1905), for example - one might have expected him to be far less willing to assent to the scientific fatalism propounded by *Os Sertões*. In this early work he expresses sympathy (or, at any rate, contempt for their adversaries) with the illiterate villagers of Tomochic, victims of a similar siege, from a 'free-thinking' but essentially humanist standpoint:

It seemed like insolence, in men without a uniform, without an officer who had gone through a military school, and ignorant of tactics as they were, to keep in check a force three times as numerous as their own, all duly uniformed, and officered by men who had commissions stamped and signed by the chief magistrate of Mexico.

... Shame, patriotism, duty, or what not spurred the general to declare that the town must be taken by assault. He might as well have waited until thirst and hunger did their work; but, not unnaturally, a soldier thinks his first duty is to fight, and in this case a red flag fluttering at the top of a tall pine stung him to fury, for nothing moves a reasonable man so much as a new flag.⁴⁸

In keeping with the 'stock-responses' already mentioned as a characteristic of his later writing, a certain amount of lip-service is paid to this attitude even in *A Brazilian Mystic*:

'our Brazilian mothers,' our 'great and glorious land,' and freedom, themes which with little variation re-occur in every speech in South America, brought forth the usual cheers ... All this ['reign of progress and peace'], of course, as is the case in all such speeches and on such occasions, was to be brought about by blood, for blood is the baptismal water by which peace is ensured.⁴⁹

The onus of sympathy has, however, ceased to be wholly with the beleaguered

⁴⁸'Progress', in *The North American Sketches of R. B. Cunningham Graham*, edited by John Walker (Edinburgh, 1986), pp.65-91 (p.81).

⁴⁹Graham, *Mystic*, p.157.

villagers, whom he describes as 'misguided sectaries', and as a 'pack of wolves' face to face with 'a submarine, charged with torpedoes and with mines'⁵⁰.

One passage which illustrates very clearly the complicated processes at work in Graham's writing at this time runs as follows:

In the days of Antonio Conselheiro, the challenge of the Semitico-Asiatic hordes had not been sounded, and the security of life and property, with European marriage, all seemed as firmly rooted as the foundations of the world.⁵¹

What at the time of 'Niggers' - with its Swiftian explanation that 'Niggers who have no cannons have no rights. Their land is ours, their cattle and their fields, their houses ours; their arms, their poor utensils, and everything they have; their women, too, are ours to use as concubines, to beat, exchange, to barter off for gunpowder or gin, ours to infect with syphilis, leave with child, outrage, torment, and make by contact with the vilest of our vile, more vile than beasts'⁵² - would have been purely ironic, is still faintly ironic. The 'Semitico-Asiatic' hordes can, however, no longer be taken simply as a bogey-man threatening the Established Order, as in 'the days of Antonio Conselheiro' - an age of innocence. Now, when Graham repeats Euclides da Cunha's table of the various cross-breeds encountered in the *Sertão*, he is careful to specify that 'The Cafuz, known in the Spanish republics as the Zambo ['the result of interbreeding between the negro and the Indian'], is the lowest of the three types'⁵³, and concludes magisterially that the Sertanejo's 'tinge of negro blood ... may perchance have given him whatever qualities the African can claim'⁵⁴.

To conclude then, the mixture of roles and qualities which we employed to characterize da Cunha's writing have their parallel in a certain duplicity at the heart of Graham's project. His preface makes it clear that he wishes to provide

⁵⁰Graham, *Mystic*, pp.173 & 205.

⁵¹Graham, *Mystic*, p.175.

⁵²Quoted in *Cunninghame Graham*, p.163.

⁵³Graham, *Mystic*, pp.11-12.

⁵⁴Graham, *Mystic*, p.17.

an accurate account of the Backlands, based on his own experience and reading - but the experience is fifty years out of date, and the reading consists (for all intents and purposes) of one book, *Os Sertões*. What in da Cunha is the logical conclusion of certain Determinist theories pushed to their breaking point becomes even more questionable in Cunninghame Graham as a result of this undeclared dependence. One thus finds passages like the ones in 'Progress', quoted above, associated with others expressing the purest reaction. The only unifying factor is, in fact, fatalism - or rather, 'the great book of human folly which so many take for fate'⁵⁵, in Cunninghame Graham's own words.

A Brazilian Mystic, then, is another generic hybrid - like Darwin's *Journal of Researches*. Its 'theory of history' - the juxtaposition of events very far in the past (the Canudos campaign itself, as well as Graham's own travels in the region twenty years before that) with an up-to-the-minute dramatized commentary - means that it adheres neither to the 'anthropological' perspective of *Os Sertões* nor the fictional subversiveness of *La guerra del fin del mundo*. There is a certain vividness in Graham's evocations of the Backlands life known by him in the past - this description of a typical house, for example: 'Two or three negro slaves and a dozen yellow dogs were certain to be lounging near the front door, or just outside the fence. To complete the Oriental air, you might have stayed a week within the house and never seen the women'⁵⁶ - but his attempts to 'novelize' the conflict itself end up sounding forced, like Shaw's 'scenes imagined by bloody-minded clerks'. This, for example, as a description of the first all-out assault on Canudos:

It was the moment for a man of spirit to curse a little, to pray a little, to talk of honour and of home, of sweethearts and of wives; to strike some, half in anger, half playfully with the flat of his sword, to encourage falterers with a brave word, to curb the headstrong, and by example, bring back courage into their hearts and order to the ranks.⁵⁷

'If only I'd been there' is an unfortunate subtext to glimpse in the history of such

⁵⁵Graham, *Mystic*, p.191.

⁵⁶Graham, *Mystic*, p.51.

⁵⁷Graham, *Mystic*, p.186.

a campaign.

In short, then, the essence of Graham's literary method, as described by Watts and Davies above ('The memories stay relatively constant; what changes is their significance'), is severely compromised in this case by 1/ his dependence on an already strongly ideologized 'history' of the campaign; and 2/ his lack of any other relevant first-hand information. The fact that Graham's own 'histories' are by no means representative of the ideals of the form ('too dependent on documentary source-material ... to be popularizations, yet too selective and quirky to be scholarly studies'⁵⁸), does not, however, disqualify them for our purposes. On the contrary, isolating the version of 'South America' presented by a work such as *A Brazilian Mystic* is made more specific by its individuality of genre as well as treatment.

⁵⁸Cunninghame Graham, p.206.

4.2.3 Mario Vargas Llosa

Rather than attempting to define the last of our authors - the novelist Mario Vargas Llosa - in the same way as the first two, I have decided to look at a single representative *datum* or piece of evidence mentioned in all three accounts, and to compare the diverse significances they elicit from it.

Euclides da Cunha states that Antonio Conselheiro 'predicted the following misfortunes for various successive years':

In 1896 a thousand flocks shall run from the seacoast to the backlands; and then the backlands will turn into seacoast and the seacoast into backlands.

In 1897 there will be much pasturage and few trails, and one shepherd and one flock only.

In 1898 there will be many hats and few heads.

In 1899 the waters shall turn to blood, and the planet shall appear in the east with the sun's ray, the bough shall find itself on the earth, and the earth some place shall find itself in heaven.

There shall be a great rain of stars, and that will be the end of the world. In 1900 the lights shall be put out. God says in the Gospel: I have a flock which is out of this sheepfold, and the flock must be united that there may be one shepherd and one flock only!⁵⁹

This prophecy, striking enough in itself, was found (according to da Cunha) 'written down in numerous small notebooks ... in Canudos'. He goes on to compare it with the 'extravagant millenarianism' of the followers of Montanus - and to supplement it with various 'mad ravings ... of the racial messiah':

when nation falls out with nation, Brazil with Brazil, England with England, Prussia with Prussia, then shall Dom Sebastião with all his army arise from the waves of the sea.⁶⁰

⁵⁹da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.135.

⁶⁰da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.136. 'Dom Sebastião' is the Portuguese equivalent of King Arthur, a historical figure identified with the leader of the forces of good in the 'last battle' of Armageddon. The jagunços expected him to intervene in the siege of Canudos.

Let us see, by contrast, what Cunninghame Graham makes of the prophecy. For a start, he edits it quite severely:

'In 1896,' he said, 'a multitude shall come up from the shore to the Sertão. The Sertão shall then become a sea-beach and the shore become Sertão. In 1898 there shall be many hats and a great scarcity of heads. In 1899 the waters shall be all changed to blood and a planet shall appear in the East ... a great fall of stars shall bring about the destruction of the world. In 1900 all lights shall be extinguished. God says in his Holy Gospel "I will have but one field and one shepherd ... for I have but a single flock."' ⁶¹

Minor differences of wording between the two quotations can be explained by the fact that Graham is following the Portuguese original - thus his 'Sertão' instead of 'backlands' - but the sense remains much the same. Samuel Putnam, the translator, comments in a footnote that 'it is obvious that the preacher is at times inspired by the mere sound of words (echolalia)' ⁶² - and gives an example from the Portuguese to confirm this (*'muito pasto e pouco rasto'*). It is presumably this that Graham is trying to echo with the consonances and assonances of 'The Sertão shall then become a sea-beach and the shore become Sertão'. The pseudo-Biblical resonance of 'there shall be many hats and a great scarcity of heads' is also rather more powerful than Putnam's 'there will be many hats and few heads'.

The main points to be made about Graham's use of this quotation are, then: 1/ its immediate context; and 2/ the artful way in which it has been compressed from da Cunha's original. Let us take the second of these first. He has, of course, left out a good deal of his prototype - the 'shepherd' and his flocks have become simply 'a multitude', and the entry for 1897 has been suppressed altogether (thus taking away a little of the Psalm-like parallelism of the original). The way it is printed, however - in a single paragraph instead of as a series of entries from an almanac - makes it seem more consciously literary. The original is, one must admit, rather confused and self-contradictory (the lights go out after the world has been destroyed), leading one to suppose that it is supposed to be read as a few

⁶¹Graham, *Mystic*, pp.85-86. (All ellipses in the original).

⁶²da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.135.

ramblings extracted from a larger body of doctrine. Graham's version makes the contradictions seem intentional. Light, after all, is the first thing to be created in Genesis; why should it not be the last to be destroyed? Whether or not he is bringing out some feature that da Cunha has suppressed is difficult to ascertain - but one has to admit that the overall effect of their versions is different.

As far as the context is concerned, it is apparent that Graham regards Antonio Conselheiro as more interesting in his own right than da Cunha does. In *Os Sertões*, the prophecy comes as the highlight of the section entitled 'Antonio Conselheiro, Striking Example of Atavism' - that is, as part of a case-study, intended to illustrate larger points about the 'degeneration' of the races in the backlands. Only enough detail is provided to allow us to assess the 'representativeness' of this example of religious fervour gone wrong. In *A Brazilian Mystic*, on the other hand, the very structure of Graham's book - a biography of Antonio Conselheiro - makes the 'mystic' into a more considerable figure. He is, to be sure, representative of various regressive types of mysticism (as in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter), but that does not prevent him from being an interesting man. The prophecy, therefore, is intended to have a literary effect as a composition in Graham - whereas in da Cunha it is seen simply as proof of the 'absurd conceptions preached by this apostle'⁶³.

Graham, despite himself, cannot help admiring the jagunços:

When all is said, it is impossible not to sympathise to some extent with the misguided sectaries, for all they wanted was to live the life they had been accustomed to, and sing their litanies.⁶⁴

Similar statements of regret at the pointlessness of the slaughter in da Cunha have a significantly different effect, as his primary concern is to present the campaign as a scientific object lesson. It may be for this reason that Graham allows himself to 'tidy up' the prophecy. He has no interest in emphasizing the deluded nature of Antonio Conselheiro's thought processes (though he does follow da Cunha's diagnosis); his concern being rather to present us with a striking piece of free

⁶³da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.135.

⁶⁴Graham, *Mystic*, p.173.

verse - to please as well as instruct.

Finally, let us look at yet another employment of this prophecy, in Vargas Llosa's *La guerra del fin del mundo*:

Alguna vez alguien - pero rara vez porque su seriedad, su voz cavernosa o su sabiduría los intimidaba - lo interrumpía para despejar una duda. ¿Terminaría el siglo? ¿Llegaría el mundo a 1900? Él contestaba sin mirar, con una seguridad tranquila y, a menudo, con enigmas. En 1900 se apagarían las luces y lloverían estrellas. Pero, antes, ocurrirían hechos extraordinarios ... En 1896 un millar de rebaños correrían de la playa hacia el sertón y el mar se volvería sertón y el sertón mar. En 1897 el desierto se cubriría de pasto, pastores y rebaños se mezclarían y a partir de entonces habría un solo rebaño y un solo pastor. En 1898 aumentarían los sombreros y disminuirían las cabezas y en 1899 los ríos se tornarían rojos y un planeta nuevo cruzaría el espacio.⁶⁵

If Graham compressed and edited the prophecy he read in da Cunha for rhetorical effect, in order to exploit its biblical resonances, Mario Vargas Llosa has preserved its oddities and merely tidied a few loose ends. The prophecy for 1897, for example (omitted altogether in Graham) has here acquired the middle stage 'pastores y rebaños se mezclarían' in order to get from da Cunha's 'much pasturage and few trails' to his 'one shepherd and one flock only'. Vargas Llosa has, it is true, left off the rather incoherent ending of the prophecy for 1899 (which one feels da Cunha sees as sure proof of 'degeneracy'): 'the bough shall find itself on the earth, and the earth some place shall find itself in heaven'. Even here, however, he cannot be faulted for faithfulness, as the fact that he has broken the prophecy up into two parts - with the predictions for 1900 off by themselves -

⁶⁵Vargas Llosa, *Guerra*, p.17: 'Occasionally someone interrupted him - though this occurred rarely, since his gravity, his cavernous voice, or his wisdom intimidated them - in order to dispel a doubt. Was the world about to end? Would it last till 1900? He would answer immediately, with no need to reflect, with quiet assurance, and very often with enigmatic prophecies. In 1900 the sources of light would be extinguished and stars would rain down. But, before that, extraordinary things would happen ... In 1896 countless flocks would flee inland from the seacoast and the sea would turn into the backlands and the backlands turn into the sea. In 1897 the desert would be covered with grass, shepherds and flocks would intermingle, and from that date on there would be but a single flock and a single shepherd. In 1898 hats would increase in size and heads grow smaller, and in 1899 the rivers would turn red and a new planet would circle through space.' (5).

means that this passage would have come in between the two. It could therefore be described as 'unreported' rather than simply left out.

There are other cunning tricks of tone in this passage which one would like to look at in detail, but I shall confine myself here to specifying two. The first is the way in which the passage is intercut with views of the reverence and awe displayed by 'the Counselor's' audience: 'su seriedad, su voz cavernosa o su sabiduría los intimidaba'. Or (the sentence I left out in quoting the passage):

Un silencio seguía a su voz, en el que se oía crepitar las fogatas y el bordoneo de los insectos que les llamas devoraban, mientras los lugareños, conteniendo la respiración, esforzaban de antemano la memoria para recordar el futuro.⁶⁶

By an adroit use of third person narration, Vargas Llosa has put us here in the position of the listening villagers - as far beneath, and as puzzled by this enigmatic figure as they are. Da Cunha and Graham have to patronize Antonio Conselheiro in order to speak of him favourably, but here we are reminded that a more appropriate stance for us would be to look up, 'conteniendo la respiración'. Vargas Llosa does this, what is more, without tempering the tone of the prophet's message. True, he contextualizes it - making it a response to someone's question, thus making the Counselor seem a more impressive intellectual presence - but this is surely much less of a liberty to take than some of Graham's stylistic devices - such as the lengthy 'reconstruction' of a typical pilgrim's journey to Canudos, or his account of what would be 'certain' to be found in a representative backlands house⁶⁷.

The second point I should like to make about this passage is based on a line in Helen Lane's English translation, from which I have quoted in my footnotes. Vargas Llosa, following da Cunha's 'In 1898 there will be many hats and few

⁶⁶Vargas Llosa, *Guerra*, p.17: 'A silence ensued after he had spoken, in which the crackling of open fires could be heard, and the buzzing of insects that the flames devoured, as the villagers, holding their breath, strained their memories before the fact in order to be certain to remember the future.' (5).

⁶⁷Graham, *Mystic*, pp.216-18 & 50-51.

heads', writes 'En 1898 aumentarían los sombreros y disminuirían las cabezas'. Lane translates this as 'hats would increase in size and heads grow smaller'. Obviously this is a misunderstanding of the phrase, which means that a lot of people would have lost their heads (= lives) by 1898 (rather an accurate prediction, in retrospect). The significant thing about it, though, is that the Spanish could be understood either way. It is only because we have other textual analogues that it can be stated authoritatively that Lane's version is incorrect. What is more, the fact that Lane could translate it in this way implies that this prophecy could be taken (in Vargas Llosa's version) as being at least partly nonsensical - there is, after all, no immediate significance to the statement that hats will get bigger and heads smaller. So, in a sense, Vargas Llosa has succeeded in literally preserving the 'enigmatic'⁶⁸ quality of the original statements - both as recorded in da Cunha, and as they (presumably) were in reality - curious words, susceptible both to misinterpretation and faulty transmission.

Vargas Llosa's imposition of the form of an historical novel on his material, then, can be seen to be an asset rather than a drawback to his mirroring of events as they may have been. Far from imposing his own viewpoint upon them (the traditional role of the writer of fiction), his version can be seen to preserve more of the ambiguity of this particular text than the doctrinaire historicism of da Cunha, or the 'common sense' of Cunningham Graham.

I quoted above Castro-Klarén's statement that 'to write historical novels one must have a theory of history', but she seems to feel that the failure fully to 'articulate' the speech of Antonio Conselheiro is a feature of all three of our texts. This discussion of the different 'versions' of the same prophetic text contained in *Os Sertões*, *A Brazilian Mystic*, and *La guerra del fin del mundo*, should give some support to my conviction that she is wrong - at any rate, in the case of Vargas Llosa. The reason why the prophecy comes so early in his book is, I suspect, primarily structural: the book is called 'The War of the End of the World', and he therefore wants to introduce as soon as possible the sense in which he means that title - not as a fanciful novel about the Apocalypse, but a novel set

⁶⁸To quote Lane's translation of 'con enigmas'.

at a particular moment in the past. He therefore has one of his villagers ask the Counselor (as yet unnamed) '¿Terminaría el siglo?'. The form of the reply tells us all he wants us, at this moment, to know - the era we are concerned with (the late nineteenth century); the sort of people the story concerns (*vaqueros* and *peones*); and, since everything before this point has been 'timeless', the survival of such wandering preachers (more appropriate to first-century Galilee, where one might, at first, imagine oneself to be) into such an era in the backlands of Brazil. He has, in other words, made in a few paragraphs most of the points that took da Cunha 120 and Graham 50 pages: the 'atavistic' resemblance to first century mystics, the ambiguity (yet power) of his prophetic utterances, and the susceptibility of the people of the backlands to an Apocalyptic sense of doom.

The point I am making is not that the historical novel is better suited to such subjects than da Cunha's history-cum-treatise or Graham's 'padded' biography (Errol Lincoln Uys' disappointing vignette of the Canudos campaign in his recent novel *Brazil* (1986) is sufficient disproof of that) - but simply that, since the historian of such events is forced to shape his narrative according to his or her prejudices and the information at his or her disposal, the fatal disingenuousness implied by Graham's references to his 'many sources' or da Cunha's pretence of 'Scientific' objectivity in fact detracts from the accuracy of the picture they present. A novelist like Vargas Llosa may therefore, paradoxically, attain a greater precision as a reporter and chronicler of events simply because his cards are laid on the table to start with. 'The truest poetry', once again, 'is the most feigning'⁶⁹.

⁶⁹Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, p.722. (*As You Like It*, III. 3. 16-17).

4.3 Conclusion - Ideas of South America

Having examined the implications of some of the textualizing strategies adopted by our three historians of Canudos, it remains to discuss the 'South American' nature of the campaign itself - why (to return to the quotation at the beginning of the chapter) it, or the errors it exemplified, were regarded by da Cunha as 'the coefficient of reduction of our nationality'. In order to do this, I will be concentrating principally on the 'sense of an ending' provided by each of the authors in question.

Let us begin, then, with Euclides da Cunha. After a laconic account of Canudos' failure to surrender (quoted above), he goes on to describe the disinterring of the 'Counselor's Corpse', and ends with 'Two Lines':

The trouble is that we do not have today a Maudsley for acts of madness and crimes on the part of nations. ...⁷⁰

The reference to 'Maudsley' is to a celebrated phrenologist⁷¹, recalled here because Antonio Conselheiro's skull was said to have 'Standing out in bold relief ... the essential lines of crime and madness'⁷². It is rather an odd note to leave us on. The reference is obscure (having to be footnoted by its own author), and the significance a little doubtful. Does he mean that his work is to be this 'Maudsley'? Or that such a gauge is impossible and not even to be thought of? The bitterness of his tone would seem to imply that he regards the findings of these 'skull-readers' as contemptible pseudo-science - but he nowhere actually informs us of his attitude towards phrenology (held in high esteem in Brazil long after it had been abandoned by the rest of the world). It is, in any case, a fatalistic and disillusioned - almost, one might say, exhausted conclusion.

Cunninghame Graham, on the other hand, ends with an extraordinary evocation of the after-lives of some of the combatants:

⁷⁰da Cunha, Rebellion, p.476.

⁷¹Mentioned in da Cunha, Rebellion, p.120.

⁷²da Cunha, Rebellion, p.476.

some of them possibly still are living ['in the impenetrable forests'], waiting for the millennium and for the prophet's second coming upon earth. Let them live on, and watch the humming-birds as they hang poised above the flowers, the lizards basking in the sun, listen to the mysterious noises that at night in the tropics rise from the woods, inhale the scent of the dank vegetation, and till their crops of mandioca and of maize. That is the true millennium, did they but know it, and each man makes or mars it for himself, as long as health gives him the power to drink it in, and to enjoy.⁷³

The actual last lines of Graham's account are in the passage quoted above, describing the 'withered flowers' found on the prophet's breast - but the tone of his conclusion is represented better here. One cannot help feeling that this set-piece nature description is a rather inadequate post-mortem on the lives of Antonio Conselheiro and his followers. Graham's evident sentimentality - what Watts and Davies call his 'recurrent indulgence in religiose reverie' - should not however be allowed to hide the larger strategy behind this and other such pieces of 'prose-poetry' in his book.

Let us look more closely at the actual imagery he employs. They are living in 'the impenetrable forests', watching 'humming-birds ... hang poised above ... flowers' and 'lizards basking in the sun', and listening to 'the mysterious noises that at night in the tropics rise from the woods'. All of these are images from the *topos* of the *locus amoenus* (as described in Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*), but they also represent a curious reversion to the 'Earthly Paradise' (or 'true millenium') myths described in Chapter One. Indeed, this surrender to the clichés surrounding the name of 'South America' in European tradition becomes increasingly apparent as Graham's text advances.

On one occasion a complaint was brought to him that a Jagunço in an excess of pious fervour had seduced a girl of tender years. He answered, 'She has but followed the common destiny of all, and passed beneath the tree of good and evil like the rest.'⁷⁴

Graham hastens to condemn this judgement of the 'Counselor', but he is careful to frame it, nevertheless, in the language of Genesis and the 'tree of good and

⁷³Graham, *Mystic*, pp.234-35.

⁷⁴Graham, *Mystic*, p.112.

evil'. His half-fascination, half-revulsion for the '*jagunços*' (so like that displayed by him towards the gauchos - as in the passage from Tschiffely's *Don Roberto* (1937) quoted, again, in Chapter One) also makes use of scientific, Darwinian imagery, but one feels that this too is being used in a 'mythological' sense - as if the universal qualities of death and rebirth familiar everywhere were in some sense especially appropriate to the South American landscape:

This struggle for existence among plants and trees presents its counterpart amongst mankind. The climate sees to it that only those most fitted to resist it arrive at manhood, and the rude life they subsequently lead has forged a race as hard as the Castilians, the Turk, the Scythians of old, or as the Mexicans.⁷⁵

Having thus read Graham's ending in the 'mythological' terms already familiar to us, let us go on to examine the conclusion of Mario Vargas Llosa's book. *La guerra del fin del mundo*, it might be argued, has many endings - to match its many narrative streams - and these are perhaps better dealt with in summary than in quotation. The actual ending comes as the culmination of an argument between a local Bahían Colonel and the gaucho lieutenant Maranhão who has been acting as unofficial executioner (by decapitation) of the prisoners. After the Colonel has humiliated the lieutenant by slapping his face and urinating on him, one of the woman prisoners (who has observed this act of revenge) catches hold of him and gives him the answer to the question he has been asking: where is *João Abade*, the military commander of the rebels?

- ¿Se escapó entonces?

La viejecita vuelve a negar, cercada por los ojos de las prisioneras.

- Lo subieron al cielo unos arcángeles - dice, chasqueando la lengua -. Yo los vi.⁷⁶

One could see this as Vargas Llosa's determination not to end in despair, but rather with a sense of victory of some sort - however equivocal. The main

⁷⁵Graham, *Mystic*, p.17.

⁷⁶Vargas Llosa, *Guerra*, p.531: "He got away, then?" The little old woman shakes her head again, encircled by the eyes of the women prisoners. "Archangels took him up to heaven," she says, clacking her tongue. "I saw them." (568).

characters of the novel have already been dealt with, in the fashion of a nineteenth-century novel: the 'nearsighted journalist' (who one feels is some kind of analogue - though not a precise one - to Euclides da Cunha, one of the dedicatees of Vargas Llosa's book) has found happiness with Jurema, whom he met in Canudos; 'Galileo Gall', the Scottish revolutionary and phrenologist (it is perhaps too neat to see him as suggested in part by R. B. Cunninghame Graham) has died precisely because of his abuse of love, with the '*fatalidad femenina*'⁷⁷ [fateful femininity] Jurema; and, finally, the Baron de Canabrava, the *éminence grise* of Bahían politics, has succeeded in making love again, thus restoring his wife and himself to the spiritual harmony they had lost in the siege. It sounds a wild farrago, but it all builds up to the single unified (avowedly authorial) conclusion to be drawn from the tale. As he himself has said, this is something new in his work:

Obligadamente, por el tipo de problema que viven los distintos personajes he tenido que pensar en ciertas ideas generales, cosa que nunca he hecho cuando escribo una novela, porque es una clase de reflexión que es más bien un obstáculo, porque una novela es un mundo fundamentalmente concreto, para mí al menos⁷⁸.

What this conclusion is defies simple expression - but it seems, essentially, to set against the 'world-historical' cataclysm of Canudos the human values and human scale of the lives and mutual affections of the various characters. In essence, then, it is an attempt to draw from the particularities of the Canudos campaign 'ciertas ideas generales'.

In my own conclusion I would like to point out that only Graham's version of the events surrounding Canudos could be said to tie into the generalized set of literary *topoi* associated with South America. His original starting-point - the letter from President Roosevelt inviting him to introduce European readers to the

⁷⁷Vargas Llosa, *Guerra*, p.475.

⁷⁸Quoted in Castro-Klarén, 'Santos and Cangaceiros', p.382: 'Because of the type of problem faced by the various characters, I have had to think in terms of generalized concepts - something which I have never done before while writing a novel, because it is a kind of thinking which tends to create obstacles, a novel being (for me, at any rate) a fundamentally concrete world of experience'. (my translation).

life lived in the backlands of Brazil - has been only too faithfully followed; and, as Watts and Davies remark, 'da Cunha toils to build his epic, while Graham is content to hustle together an engagingly dramatic life-story'⁷⁹ - a kind of South American travelogue with historical elements. Thus the frequent digressions into purple prose descriptive of nature or the Brazilian lifestyle - praise of 'tropic vegetation, with the groves of palms and of bamboos fringing the bank'⁸⁰ alternating with 'reconstructions' of Antonio Conselheiro's early life:

Imagination pictures him, dressed in drill trousers and an alpaca coat, seated absorbed with the small details of a village store, his recreations a walk round the plaza in the evening, or a rare visit, on a pacing mule, to a country neighbour a league or two away.⁸¹

The 'pacing mule' sums up his method particularly well. In fact, one comes to feel that these digressions are perceived by him as being more central to his purpose than the narrative of the siege. He characterizes Antonio Conselheiro's ten years in the wilderness, for example, by remarking that 'Nature in Brazil is so tremendous, not cut in squares and utterly subdued and tamed as here in Europe; it is so overpowering in its strength that it reduces man to the proportions of an ant, busy, but futile in his enterprises against her immensity'⁸². This may perhaps be true in general, but surely not of the man who, in 1897, succeeded in convulsing an entire nation.

When one compares Graham with our two South American authors, one finds (not surprisingly) their intentions to be very different. Euclides da Cunha set out, it is true, to characterize an entire region of his nation - but the immensity of this task was sufficient to daunt him without adding the burden of a general 'Anatomy' of South America (indeed the sole use of the latter term in *Os Sertões* comes when he mentions the Buenos Aires paper 'that perhaps carries most

⁷⁹Cunninghame Graham, p.278.

⁸⁰Graham, *Mystic*, p.14.

⁸¹Graham, *Mystic*, p.62.

⁸²Graham, *Mystic*, p.67.

weight of any in South America⁸³ - meaning, presumably, to distinguish it from 'Spanish' or 'Latin' America). Mario Vargas Llosa, as a Peruvian, is forced to relocate himself to some extent in order to write a book set in Brazil - but the tone (already noted in our analysis of his employment of the 'prophecy') of events that might have happened anywhere and which are universally significant, despite their specifically regional (Brazilian, even *Sertanejo* - rather than 'South American') trappings, is sustained throughout. The move from the particular to the universal here seems to be confined to the Latin Americans - while the attempt to restrict all significance to a regional level is an attribute of the European historian.

This is, one must admit, largely a matter of degree. Nevertheless, it remains my contention that not only is Cunninghame Graham's the only one of the three accounts that mentions 'South America' as if that were what he was characterizing in this book (and in his historical works generally), but also that only his can be shown to contain any of the paraphernalia of romantic stereotypes and myth that have traditionally been employed to represent such regions in European literature. The pressure of facts connected with Canudos itself, and that of the various roles in which the three of them write, may do a good deal to obscure such 'hidden agendas' in their work - but the comparison should at least have made it clear that, while all three mythologize a 'mundo concreto' in their own image, only Graham is prepared to associate that construct specifically with South America. As Vargas Llosa puts it (and it is perhaps a fitting epigraph for our tale):

- ¿Se da cuenta? - dijo el periodista miope, respirando como si acabara de realizar un esfuerzo enorme -. Canudos no es una historia, sino un árbol de historias.⁸⁴

⁸³da Cunha, *Rebellion*, p.384.

⁸⁴Vargas Llosa, *Guerra*, p.433: "Don't you see?" the nearsighted journalist said, breathing as though he were exhausted from some tremendous physical effort. "Canudos isn't a story; it's a tree of stories." (459).

PART 3
Romance

Chapter 5

Hudson and the Pastoral

5.1 Questions of Genre

For reasons of rhetoric - that is to say, for clarity - most of the argument so far has been conducted in terms of binary oppositions. In Chapter One a distinction was made between 'mythologies' and 'fictions' of South America, so as to be able to differentiate the presuppositions we all share from the creative elaboration of those concepts in writing. It was made clear at the time that this was a model devised to stand in for a far more complex situation, but as this 'dialectic' pairing was complicated by the subsequent discussion, as well as being supplemented by new paradigms in each successive chapter, it is hoped that this methodological convenience has been justified.

In Chapter Two, a prototype for examination of a single author in terms of synchronic context and individual variations was proposed. The chronological elasticity required in order to characterize the intellectual milieu which gives definition to a work of literature was stressed, in much the same way as the exigencies of genre in the next two chapters. In Chapter Three, then, our binary opposition was between the text and the experience of the construct known as a 'Naturalist's Voyage'; while in Chapter Four I attempted to reintroduce the distinction between Latin American and European perceptions of the same continent which had already been raised in my preface, as well as Chapter One.

Clearly, each of these pairings constitutes an ongoing argument, with only partial resolutions offered in the context of each 'author-study'. Our progress up to this point, however, demands that we now turn to scrutinize the question of possible distinctions to be made between 'fictionalizations' of 'South America' in overtly factual writing, and 'fictionalizations' in fiction. Fiction is, undoubtedly, a matter of intention. I do not mean by this to say that one simply 'intends' to write in a particular genre, and therefore does so - but rather that the suspension of *veritas* in favour of verisimilitude, an essential concomitant of fiction, requires a greater intensity of intention than other forms of narrative prose. One might begin to write a history or a biography and consciously falsify or distort the data

at one's disposal, but this is still to recognize, without honouring them, a set of convictions about the fixity of the outside world. A more likely case is that someone will attempt to describe an event or a theory and simply get it wrong - through idleness, or inattention, or faulty self-expression. All of which serves to confirm that a belief, no matter how attenuated, in at least the possible truth of what is being said is an inescapable part of the process of reading non-fictional prose.

Fiction, on the other hand, requires a far greater suspension of conventional standards of judgement from both of its audience and its author. The author tries to make his narrative make sense (as it were, 'be real') in context - but his relationship to the outside world is now almost that of a Platonist to the 'forms' or archetypes of reality. He need not echo any event that ever occurred or any characteristic of the reality with which he is familiar, but he must provide a sufficiently tangible cosmos to convince his readers, as they read, that it has significance for them.

Attempting to pose the question in a more concrete way, one might say that our project must be to differentiate between the sorts of reading appropriate to W. H. Hudson's specifically 'Naturalistic' texts - *The Naturalist in La Plata*, *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893), or *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918) - and his 'South American Romances': *The Purple Land* (1885), *El Ombú* (1902), and *Green Mansions*. (It is, however, also of retrospective interest in terms of our discussions of the 'factual' *Journal of Columbus* and 'fictional' Romance *Oroonoko* of Aphra Behn in Chapter Two - not to mention the elaboration of 'fictional' elements involved in the textualization of experience in Darwin's *Journal of Researches* and Cunninghame Graham's historical biography *A Brazilian Mystic*.) There is no simple and immediate answer to such a question, since it introduces a distinction that was almost certainly not felt to be crucial by Hudson himself. The same sensibility, after all, expresses itself in both sets of works - in not dissimilar terms. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the matter can be profitably considered if it is approached in the following manner.

I have said that Hudson's works all express the same 'sensibility'. One very obvious way in which this becomes apparent is Hudson's dependence on a limited

set of themes and images which appear to have a significance for him beyond their immediate meaning in context. One of the best examples (and one which is discussed in Ruth Tomalin's biography of Hudson¹) is his fascination with birds, transferred to images of 'Bird-women' - conceived either as predatory birds of prey (like the witches in 'Pelino Viera's Confession' (1883)), or as guileless song-birds (Rima in *Green Mansions* or Fan in *Fan, The Story of a Young Girl's Life* (1892)). Hudson was an ornithologist of some distinction, and wrote a number of books about British and South American birds, so it is important to note that this tendency tends to manifest itself more when he is discussing women than when he is dealing specifically with birds. In other words, women are seen by him in avian terms, but not necessarily vice versa.

Other examples of Hudson's predominant imagery include snakes (or 'serpents'), which have a two-fold significance for him. On the one hand they recall Biblical phrases and themes to him (particularly 'bruising the heel'²) - expressions appropriate to his role as the 'High Priest' of Nature. On the other hand, they allow him to express that alien, almost malignant spirit - inimical to mankind - which he felt at times to reside in objects as various as rivers, trees, and (especially) human and animal eyes. One might go on to point out various sub-branches and sub-sets of these clusters of images - trees, seen as animate but not necessarily anthropomorphic beings; rivers, related to snakes, but also to women's hair and bodies (in 'Dead Man's Plack' (1920)); also plains - the plains of Patagonia (in *Idle Days in Patagonia*), the Pampas, the Cotswold downs, and outspread vistas in general. Having made the contention, though, the next thing is to substantiate it.

These images recur obsessively in Hudson's work, but with different meanings depending on their diverse contexts. The remnants of Hudson's projected *Book of the Serpent* (reprinted in four chapters of *The Book of a Naturalist* (1919)), for example, show the same fascination with snakes as the 'seduction' scene in *Green*

¹Tomalin, pp.120 & 148.

²Genesis 3. 15: 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'.

Mansions - where Abel has his heel bitten while attempting to seize Rima - but whereas in the first case Hudson is content to explore the facts and myths surrounding the creature, in the second he dramatizes it and gives it a thematic purpose in the work as a whole. This difference in function, which can be more or less extrapolated to cover other employments of these images, suggests a provisional solution to the question of how to present this dichotomy between fiction and non-fiction. We can interrogate the images in Hudson's fiction, since they must (by definition) be serving some dramatic function, however minor, in context. We cannot, however, repeat this process with the images in his autobiographical or 'Nature' writings - since the system of which they are a thematic part has expanded to include the whole of Nature, of his life, or (if you prefer) of the world. This, then, is the difference between the two classes of work - the non-fiction aims to comment on reality, and therefore moves within a system which is too large to be apprehensible critically; the fiction, on the other hand, comments only on its own cosmos (however closely that may echo the real one), and can therefore be scrutinized in terms of its immediate meaning within that smaller system.

What this means in practice is that we can submit these images to critical inquiry without lapsing into the biographical or psychoanalytical speculation which would be otherwise inevitable. A further point growing out of this one should, however, be raised first. Hudson was born and brought up on the Argentinian pampas (as he describes in *Far Away and Long Ago*), but left there in his early thirties to pursue his work as an ornithologist in England. All of his books date from this later period, and at least half of them are set in England (though the preponderance of South American settings is greater in the novels).

Is there, then, some structural distinction - along the lines of the one proposed between his fiction and non-fiction - to be made between 'fictional' versions of England and South America? This is obviously a crucial point for the purposes of this chapter - and one to which a 'cumulative' answer is offered by the thesis as a whole - but, at present, the best procedure would appear to be to continue to use our 'image-clusters' as the vehicles for discussion, by the simple expedient of noting any differences in the treatment of women and snakes in, say, *A Crystal Age* (1887), set in an England of the future, and *The Purple Land*; or *Fan* (set in London), and *Green Mansions*.

5.2 Themes and Images

5.2.1 Fiction - Non-Fiction

Speaking of this serpent with a strange name [the 'serpent with a cross'], I recall the fact that Darwin made its acquaintance during his Patagonian rambles about sixty years ago; and in describing its fierce and hideous aspect, remarks, 'I do not think I ever saw anything more ugly, excepting, perhaps, some of the vampire bats.' He speaks of the great breadth of the jaws at the base, the triangular snout, and the linear pupil in the midst of the mottled coppery iris, and suggests that its ugly and horrible appearance is due to the resemblance of its face, in its shape, to the human countenance.

This idea of the ugliness or repulsiveness of an inferior animal, due to its resemblance to man in face, is not, I believe, uncommon; and I suppose that the reason that would be given for the feeling is that an animal of that kind looks like a vile copy of ourselves, or like a parody maliciously designed to mock us. It is an erroneous idea, or, at all events, is only a half-truth, as we recognize at once when we look at animals that are more or less human-like in countenance, and yet cause no repulsion. Seals may be mentioned - the mermaids and mermen of the old mariners; also the sloth with its round simple face, to which its human shape imparts a somewhat comical and pathetic look.³

A number of points could be made about this quotation, but I think it best to begin by discussing the reasons Hudson gives for disagreeing with this observation of Darwin's. Hudson, though a reluctant convert to Evolutionism in his youth, was always jealous of Darwin's renown as a commentator on South America. The rather personal nature of this feeling was betrayed in an exchange of views which took place between the two in the 1870 *Proceedings* of the Zoological Society of London, over the habits of the Carpintero, a South American woodpecker. Hudson remarked, with regard to a passage in *The Origin of Species* (1859):

However close an observer that naturalist may be, it was not possible for him to know much of a species from seeing perhaps one or two individuals, in the course of a rapid ride across the pampas ...

The perusal of the passage ... to one acquainted with the bird

³W. H. Hudson, *Idle Days in Patagonia* (London, 1924), p.25.

referred to, and its habitat, might induce him to believe that the author purposely wrested the truths of Nature to prove his theory; but as his 'Researches', written before the theory of Natural Selection was conceived - abounds in similar misstatements, when treating of this country, it should rather, I think, be attributed to carelessness⁴.

Darwin replied quite mildly, pointing out his evidence for the assertion, but complaining: 'I should be loath to think that there are many naturalists who, without any evidence, would accuse a fellow worker of telling a deliberate falsehood to prove his theory'⁵.

That lack of evidence was, in fact, the point. It is no disparagement of Hudson to say that, despite his considerable erudition in the field of natural history, he was never a man of science in the strict meaning of the term. Hudson had observed this woodpecker all his life, and had a close knowledge of the wildlife of his own district - he therefore assumed that the visiting expert Darwin, in his 'rapid ride', could have seen little that he had missed. His argument swiftly descends to personalities. Darwin, on the other hand, had the work of Don Felix de Azara (a celebrated Argentinian Naturalist) to back him up, as well as the evidence collected on a number of his own visits to the north bank of the Plata. The difference, then, amounted to the fact that Hudson's primary focus was on the bird - and his own experience of it - while Darwin's was on the conclusions that might be drawn from its habits. Hudson, too, was familiar with Azara's work, which he used extensively for his own work on *Argentine Ornithology* (1888-89), but his view of birds and animals and their habits remains an impressionistic one by comparison with Darwin's devotion to 'generalization' (as discussed in Chapter Three above). To make the point more clearly, further examples of this essential difference in attitude between the two can be quoted from Hudson's later work.

In the chapter on 'Eyes' in *Idle Days in Patagonia*, for example, Hudson complains:

For sober fact one is accustomed to look to men of science; yet,

⁴Quoted in Tomalin, p.89.

⁵Tomalin, p.90.

strange to say, while these complain that we - the unscientific ones - are without any settled and correct ideas about the colour of our own eyes, they have endorsed the poet's fable [of green eyes]⁶.

Hudson, then, accepts the designation of 'unscientific' - but points out that writers like himself may achieve a more accurate picture of things by not being so burdened with presuppositions. Thus, to return to our starting point - the controversy about why the face of the '*serpent with a cross*' seems so horrible to human beings - it is hard to believe that Darwin meant his own observations on the subject very seriously (though ideas of this kind would figure in his later work on *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872)), but to Hudson this sort of speculation about precisely why we find a particular face in Nature more horrible than another was of the utmost concern. Neither of them has much time for the 'poet's fable' - comments about Nature must be based on close observation in both cases; but to Hudson, nevertheless, the personality and experience of an observer is of more than peripheral interest. All of his nature writings thus become a sort of 'natural autobiography' - or adventure of the soul among birds and beasts. Darwin's final word on the subject (in the 1888 edition of *The Origin of Species*) was to call Hudson 'an excellent observer'⁷: a discreet phrase which avoided the vexed question of his qualifications as a theorist.

In some ways, then, the difference between Darwin and Hudson's conclusions about the snake is more a question of genre than of fact. It would be incorrect to regard Darwin's view as 'more correct' simply because it is closer to the modern view of the separation of science and *belles lettres*.

it is true that there is something human in the faces of this and perhaps of other pit-vipers, ... as Darwin remarks; and that the horror they excite in us is due to this resemblance; what he failed to see was that it is the expression rather than the shape that horrifies.⁸

What Hudson, in his turn, failed to see was that Darwin was not really very

⁶Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.193.

⁷Tomalin, p.91.

⁸Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.26.

interested in the snake or its expression, except as a means to an end - proof of the processes of 'Natural Selection' in Nature.

Hudson's disagreements with Darwin and other men of science must therefore be seen partly as misunderstandings, based on a failure to recognize that they were arguing from different premises; yet it is a striking fact that, despite this confusion, the two intellectual stances had sufficient in common for discussion to take place at all. Hudson, for example, calls Darwin's theory to account for the horror evoked by the snake's expression, 'an erroneous idea, or, at all events, ... only a half-truth', thus implying that he thinks there is a single discoverable cause for this emotion. When he goes on to specify that it is the expression of the face, rather than its admitted resemblance to a human, that causes us to shudder, the divergence widens.

Looking at a serpent of this kind, and I have looked at many a one, the fancy is born in me that I am regarding what was once a fellow-being, perhaps one of those cruel desperate wretches I have encountered on the outskirts of civilization, who for his crimes has been changed into the serpent form, and cursed with immortality.⁹

On the face of it, it is a little surprising to find an argument with Darwin couched in terms such as these - 'mermaids and mermen', metempsychosis, and people 'cursed with immortality' - but it is essential to realize that, given Hudson's terms of reference, these are statements with their own kind of precision. He wishes to convey to us how he feels when he looks at the face of this type of serpent, and these literary analogies provide an exact gauge of his emotion.

The area of discourse inhabited by Hudson's nature writings is made clearer when one looks at two further 'controversies' in *Idle Days in Patagonia* - one with Darwin (again) over why 'these arid wastes' of Patagonia had taken 'so firm possession' of his mind¹⁰; and the other with Herman Melville, over his statement in *Moby Dick* that it is the quality of whiteness which makes creatures like 'the

⁹Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.26.

¹⁰Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.203.

polar bear, and the white shark of the tropical seas ... so much more terrible to us than other savage rapacious creatures that are dangerous to man'¹¹.

Taking the first of these first, Darwin thought that this feeling was caused by the fact that the 'plains of Patagonia are boundless, for they are scarcely practicable, and hence unknown'¹². Hudson complains that since then the plains have become 'practicable', and yet have lost nothing of their allure; and so it must be that 'the grey, monotonous solitude woke other and deeper feelings [than those of 'wonder and admiration'], and in that mental state the scene was indelibly impressed on the mind'¹³. In the second case, Hudson complains of the vagueness of this 'illusive something'¹⁴ which is supposed to distinguish 'the innermost idea of this hue' (the 'whiteness of the whale'), and proceeds to explain away the various instances given in evidence by Melville in terms of the 'animism that exists in us, and our animistic way of regarding all exceptional phenomena'¹⁵.

The 'solutions' to both of these controversies may seem as vague as the original statements - but Hudson goes to great pains to define them in all their ramifications, devoting a chapter to each one. The interesting thing about these disagreements, however, is that Hudson makes no distinction between a statement about the 'quality of whiteness' in a novel about a white whale, and Darwin's musings in his *Journal of Researches* over why the plains of Patagonia have remained so impressed on his mind. And yet he is not ignorant of this genre distinction - he remarks, *à propos* of Melville, that the dissertation on whiteness in his 'romance of *Moby Dick, or The White Whale* ... is ... perhaps the finest thing in the book'¹⁶. Similarly, with Darwin, he makes no acknowledgement of the marginal nature of these speculations about Patagonia in the narrative from which they are extracted, though he does hint at it ^{by calling it 'a} passage which, for me, has a

¹¹Hudson, *Idle Days*, pp.112-13.

¹²Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.203.

¹³Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.206.

¹⁴Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.111.

¹⁵Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.116.

¹⁶Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.110. (My underlining).

very special interest and significance¹⁷.

I suspect, therefore, that this is a deliberate misapplication for effect of statements taken out of context, rather than an actual misreading of their significance. One could perhaps sum up its effect by saying that Hudson's non-fictional writings - be they Naturalistic or autobiographical - inhabit a very particular generic space. It is a space which should be equated with the more fanciful moments of researchers like Darwin, as well as the more analytical portions of novels like Melville's. To define this textual area of Hudson's accurately, it will be necessary to match it against that occupied by his own fiction - but it is perhaps sufficient for the moment to say that it is like an essayist's mixture of anecdote, analogy and analysis. Like Montaigne, Hudson takes a topic, records his personal experience of it - referring to parallels in his equivalent of the classical literatures, the writings of other Naturalists - and finally decides his case by appealing to the 'common sense' view of the question. Both Melville and Darwin, therefore, are grist for his mill. It is not that he has mistaken the function of their writings, but rather that he is adapting to them to his own purposes.

Returning to snakes, then, the following passage, from Hudson's short story 'An Old Thorn' (1920), mentions:

the ivy, rising like a slender black serpent of immense length, springing from the roots, winding upwards, and in and out, among the grey branches, binding them together, and resting its round, dark cluster of massed leaves on the topmost boughs. That green disc was the ivy-serpent's flat head and was the head of the whole tree, and there it had its eyes, which gazed for ever over the wide downs, watching all living things, cattle and sheep and birds and men in their comings and goings; and although fast-rooted in the earth, following them, too, in all their ways, even as it had followed him, to break him at last.¹⁸

The reference to 'him' is to the protagonist of the story, Johnnie Budd,

¹⁷Hudson, Idle Days, p.203. (My underlining).

¹⁸W. H. Hudson, Dead Man's Plack, An Old Thorn and Poems (London, 1935), pp.129-30.

hanged for sheep-stealing in 1821, and celebrated throughout the West Country for his insistence on stopping to beg forgiveness of a 'wishing tree' which he believed himself to have wronged, on his way to trial. This incident, which Hudson learnt about by talking to local people, may well be historical - nevertheless, it is written as fiction, with all the characters reimagined and remotivated (the constable, the unfortunate Johnnie, his wife Marty, and even, as we have seen, the tree itself).

The fact that the tree is festooned with ivy is a simple matter of observation (the 'old thorn' in question was still alive in Hudson's time), and even the resemblance of this ivy to a 'slender black serpent' could be passed off as a fairly straightforward simile; but when we arrive at the 'ivy-serpent's flat head' which was also 'the head of the whole tree, and there it had its eyes', it is obvious that we are going beyond metaphor into what Hudson himself calls 'animism'. The tree is the thematic centre of the story despite the fact that it remains inactive throughout - each one of Johnnie's misfortunes being implied by Hudson to be linked to his original 'defiance' of the thorn by climbing on its branches as a child. It is made clear, however, that while this link exists, it may be purely within Johnnie's mind - in fact, this is the explanation to which both Johnnie and Hudson (as the narrator) cling. Even the prayer to the tree before the trial is portrayed in passive terms - certainly it has no good effect on Johnnie's fortunes.

There is, then, a hierarchy of readings suggested by this story. On the one hand there is 'Hudson the narrator's' - which is that such local anecdotes record the last vestiges in England of 'tree-worship':

I had formed the opinion that in many persons the sense of a strange intelligence and possibility of power in such trees is not a mere transitory state but an enduring influence which profoundly affects their whole lives.¹⁹

Then there is the opinion of Johnnie and the whole district (as they are portrayed in the story), which is that the thorn seems to have power over the people and creatures around it, and that it is wise to placate it whether or not one really

¹⁹Hudson, *Dead Man's Plack*, p.111.

believes it to be a supernatural entity. Finally, there is the view of the 'common reader', who tends to take it as a ghost story, with the tree taking a blind, unconscious revenge on anyone who arouses its ill-will (like Johnnie and the other children). It is according to this last reading that the 'serpent' makes most sense - a literal personification of the force which inhabits this piece of neutral nature.

Hudson the writer is careful not to declare himself too unequivocally for any of these readings - the last and most credulous of them is fostered by him through the suggestive grouping of events, but he never endorses it with any unequivocal descriptions of supernatural phenomena. He pays lip-service to the first, rationalist reading - implied to be his own - but undercuts it at the same time with leading statements (such as the one quoted above) about the presence of inchoate forces, beyond good and evil, in nature. The middle view is the safest - providing for both possibilities - but Hudson is careful to make it clear that all of his information comes from local report and gossip, that none of these events may ever have happened, and that therefore the acceptance even of so open a view would be making too many assumptions about the reliability of tradition. Hudson's avoidance of 'closure' may thus be seen to be symbolized by the central figure of the tree - an actual, existing thorn (we are told); also the central character of a ghost story; also a local landmark with slightly unwholesome associations.

The serpent, however, complicates the matter. Trees, of course, are associated with snakes from the Adam and Eve story; but this snake is not so much a spirit of evil as a blind power that echoes the motives with which it is approached. The 'old thorn had been a good thorn to him - first and last'²⁰, says an old friend of the narrator's, as he recalls an escape from a thick mist which he attributes to its intervention. Johnnie, on the other hand, is crushed by it as he and his friends 'crushed' its branches. Hudson, then, might be seen to suggest here a revisionist reading of the Genesis story - the 'bruising of the heel' as a reaction caused by the 'crushing of the head'. This fits his own pantheist spirit, and yet allows him still

²⁰Hudson, *Dead Man's Plack*, p.109.

to use this image to suggest something of his own disquiet at the existence of forces in our world with such a blind power for destruction. The snake, then, performs a thematic role out of proportion to its actual presence in the story. Since it is only in this description of the tree (presented as a vision of Johnnie's during the trial) that Hudson lets his mask of inscrutability slip for even a moment, he could not be said to be declaring himself unequivocally for a supernatural reading of his narrative; but he does make it clear that the sense of menace which is evoked there defies any easy spirit of rationalization.

Other snakes in Hudson's fiction include the one in *Green Mansions* which bites Abel on the occasion of his first encounter with Rima, but I shall be discussing this in more detail later. For the moment, then, our first example can be supplemented by another from Hudson's early novel *The Purple Land*²¹. In the chapter 'The Woman and the Serpent', Hudson's philandering hero Richard Lamb encounters a 'fat señora'²² whom he has to flatter in order to avoid going to prison (her husband is the local magistrate). After this she shows a distressing inclination to follow him about, until one day she is frightened off by 'a pretty little snake, about eighteen inches long, which she had seen gliding away at her feet'²³. Lamb, observing this, decides to catch the snake ('a harmless species, one of the innocuous *Coronella* genus'²⁴):

It occurred to me that if I kept it on my person it might serve as a sort of talisman to protect me from the disagreeable attentions of the señora. Finding it was a very sly little snakey ... full of subtle deceit, I put it into my hat, which, when firmly pressed on to my head, left no opening for the little arrowy head to insinuate itself through.²⁵

Predictably, when he next encounters the señora and removes his hat -

²¹Since I shall be quoting from the 1904 revision of the novel, so entitled, I do not think it necessary to use the complete title of the 1885 edition: *The Purple Land that England Lost*.

²²W. H. Hudson, *South American Romances: The Purple Land; Green Mansions; El Ombú* (London, 1930), p.104.

²³Hudson, *Romances*, p.108.

²⁴Hudson, *Romances*, p.109.

²⁵Hudson, *Romances*, pp.109-10.

'Unfortunately I had forgotten the snake, when out it dropped on the floor; then followed screams, confusion, and scuttling out of the kitchen by madame, children, and servants'²⁶.

The innuendo in this passage is obvious enough, but any sexual *double-entendre* remains a subtext. What is more interesting is the varied uses which the snake is put to as a narrative device. On the one hand, there is the contrast which is made between the unreasonable fear felt by the large woman, and the understandable panic of the small snake:

how gigantic and deformed a monster that fat woman must have seemed to it! The terror of a timid little child at the sight of a hippopotamus, robed in flowing bed-curtains and walking erect on its hind legs, would perhaps be comparable to the panic possessing the shallow brain of the poor speckled thing when that huge woman came striding over it.²⁷

Hudson appears to be transferring his hero's own horror at the size and feminine attributes of the woman to the snake ('how gigantic and deformed a monster'), while in the process defining himself as small and harmless. The significance of the byplay with the hat is that it is all a bluff - the harmless, sexless nature of the snake meaning that the woman is no danger from any 'poison'. The woman's fear of the serpent is both physical and symbolic - she is afraid of being bitten or stung, but this serves as a mask for her real fear of it as the type of the seducer. And, of course, it has this effect because she is herself both repelled and attracted by the notion of adultery with Richard. The snake serves to externalize for both of them their true reaction to the situation they find themselves in - in Richard's case, it reminds him that 'innocent' flirtation with young girls is his real desire: adult sexuality (in the form of his 'child-wife' Paquita) is what he is in flight from; for the woman, it is a reminder that seductions have consequences, and that her good-looking young guest may prove a 'viper in the bosom'. An appropriate punishment for the snake is therefore transferred to the man who harboured it:

²⁶Hudson, *Romances*, p.110.

²⁷Hudson, *Romances*, pp.108-09.

I soon heard him [the magistrate] loud in a stormy altercation with his wife. Perhaps she wanted him to have me decapitated.²⁸

In the end, however, like the snake, they simply let him go.

The 'sly little snakey' in this episode is, then, the vehicle for a series of rather disturbing Freudian puns - 'the viper in the bosom', the 'little arrowy head' in the hat, and the view of a woman (as opposed to a girl) as a 'hippopotamus, robed in flowing bed-curtains'. Since it serves to remind us of some of the underlying tensions beneath Richard Lamb's picaresque progress, however, it could not be said to be an unimportant element in the story. Even on such a level as this, Hudson gets a certain resonance out of his fascination with snakes, while, on a larger scale (in 'An Old Thorn' or *Green Mansions*), they serve as indicators of a story's entire theme.

If we return to our original question: the relation between the employment of 'image-clusters' (such as that associated by him with snakes), in Hudson's fiction and non-fiction - it should now be possible to make some effective distinctions. The most obvious is, of course, scope. The snakes in Hudson's nature writings act as rather obscure gauges of emotional tension. When, in *Idle Days in Patagonia*, Hudson wishes to delineate the state of mind of one of the 'aboriginal inhabitants', to whom 'the river ... is the most powerful thing in nature, the most beneficent, and his chief god', he concludes by saying that it 'would appear a sinuous shiny line, like a serpent with a glittering skin lying at rest on the grass'²⁹. Similarly, on discovering that a poisonous snake has been sleeping with him all night, he remarks:

My hospitality had been unconscious, nor, until that moment, had I known that something had touched me, and that virtue had gone out from me; but I rejoice to think that the secret deadly creature, after lying all night with me, warming its chilly blood with my warmth, went back unbruised to its den.³⁰

²⁸Hudson, *Romances*, p.111.

²⁹Hudson, *Idle Days*, pp.42-43.

³⁰Hudson, *Idle Days*, pp.24-25.

We have here another example of Hudson in Biblical mood - the serpent has touched him, as the woman touched Christ, and 'virtue had gone out from me'. He rejoices that it has gone back 'unbruised to its den', a sort of innocent succubus; but his own eccentric reaction of 'rejoicing' at the snake's sleeping with him inspires more psychological than technical interest in the reader.

It is difficult, in other words, to get beyond biographical character analysis when scrutinizing the images in Hudson's non-fictional writings. We know that snakes are important to him, but we are no closer to knowing why after listing many such citations than after reading one. In his fiction, on the other hand, the snake images which we have looked at are forced to provide their own significance. The 'snaking' ivy around the tree in 'An Old Thorn' is, to be sure, proof of Hudson's tendency to see things - especially things of an ambiguous moral nature - in terms of serpents, but it also has a specific (and unsettling) function within the narrative. In a sense, then, Hudson has sublimated his fascination for snakes into an emotionally resonant story. Similarly, in *The Purple Land*, written thirty years earlier, a snake is made to assume the weight of responsibility for Richard Lamb's philandering which is shirked by him in the rest of the novel, mainly (one feels) because it is a snake.

The difference in function can be made clearer if we discard this image for a moment, and take a more particular look at the book from which I have principally been quoting, *Idle Days in Patagonia*. In the last chapter, 'The Perfume of an Evening Primrose', Hudson attempts to characterize the sensations that overcome him when he smells the flower:

when I approach the flower to my face and inhale its perfume, then a shock of keen pleasure is experienced, and a mental change so great that it is like a miracle. For a space of time so short that if it could be measured it would probably be found to occupy no more than a fraction of a second, I am no longer in an English garden recalling and consciously thinking about that vanished past, but during that brief moment time and space seem annihilated and the past is now.³¹

In effect, he finds himself 'again on the grassy pampas, where I have been sleeping

³¹Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.234.

very soundly under the stars'. This passage was published in 1893. Marcel Proust published *Du côté de chez Swann* in 1913. There is therefore little possibility of direct influence (since it seems unlikely that Proust read Hudson) in their independent use of this image of the past restored in a moment by a taste or a scent. What is most interesting about this anticipation, though, is the difference of employment that is masked by the similarity of the two sentiments.

The point can be perhaps emphasized by reference to Borges's short story 'El Congreso', where a group of people meet in Argentina to form a 'Congreso del Mundo que representaría a todos los hombres de todas las naciones'³². As they continue to meet, their plans become larger and larger - their library more unwieldy - until the founder, don Alejandro Glencoe, burns their headquarters to the ground:

- Cuatro años he tardado en comprender lo que les digo ahora. La empresa que hemos acometido es tan vasta que abarca - ahora lo sé - el mundo entero. No es unos cuantos charlatanes que aturden en los galpones de una estancia perdida. El Congreso del Mundo comenzó con el primer instante del mundo y proseguirá cuando seamos polvo. No hay un lugar en que no esté. El Congreso es los libros que hemos quemado. El Congreso es los caledonios que derrotaron a los legiones de los Césares. El Congreso es Job en el muladar y Cristo en la Cruz. El Congreso es aquel muchacho inútil que malgasta mi hacienda con las ramerías.³³

³²Borges, IV, 115-30 (p.119): 'a Congress of the World that would represent all men of all nations.' (translations quoted from Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sand and The Gold of the Tigers: Selected Later Poems*, translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni and Alastair Reid (Harmondsworth, 1980) - page numbers thus (20)).

³³Borges, IV, 128-29: "It has taken me four years to understand what I am about to say," don Alejandro began. "My friends, the undertaking we have set for ourselves is so vast that it embraces - I now see - the whole world. Our Congress cannot be a group of charlatans deafening each other in the sheds of an out-of-the-way ranch. The Congress of the World began with the first moment of the world and it will go on when we are dust. There's no place on earth where it does not exist. The Congress is the books we've burned. [The Congress is the Pictish tribes who routed the legions of the Caesars.] The Congress is Job on the ash heap and Christ on the Cross. The Congress is that worthless boy who squanders my substance on whores." (32). (The portion in square brackets, omitted by the original translator, has been supplied by myself).

Proust's evocation of the past has meaning within a context; his memories of Combray, Balbec, Venice provide the narrator with a framework within which he can make sense of his entire life, and (by extension) the lives of his friends - Swann, Charlus, Saint-Loup. Hudson's experience has meaning within the world he inhabits, and hence is partial, a fragment of experience incapable of leading to any transcendent '*Temps retrouvé*'. Proust's novel is 'autobiographical' - as is Hudson's travel book - but the difference is that Proust has organized his life as a complete fictional structure, whereas Hudson has clung to the skeleton of fact. It may be that Proust imposes a false order on the life of 'Marcel'; it may also be that Hudson's book is no more faithful to fact than *Du côté de chez Swann* - the intention, the context, the genre is everything: the system of meaning within which a personal image is allowed to mean.

5.2.2 South America - England

The bird-language of an English wood or orchard, made up in most part of melodious tones, may be compared to a band composed entirely of small wind instruments with a limited range of sound, and which produces no storms of noise, eccentric flights, and violent contrasts, nor anything to startle the listener - a sweet but somewhat tame performance. The South American forest has more the character of an orchestra, in which a countless number of varied instruments take part in a performance in which there are many noisy discords, while the tender spiritual tones heard at intervals seem, by contrast, infinitely sweet and precious.³⁴

The quotation above comes from the section in *Idle Days in Patagonia* in which Hudson seeks to differentiate between English and South American bird-song. I have already mentioned his tendency to see women in terms of birds - either predatory, like Mary Starbrow in *Fan* ('she walked away, her head well up, and with that stately bird-like gait seen in some women'³⁵); or innocent and guileless, like Fan herself in that novel ('Fan went out for her walk feeling as light-hearted as a linnet ... and as she walked along with swift elastic tread she could hardly refrain from bursting bird-like into some natural joyous melody'³⁶). It therefore seems best to examine the distinctions to be made between his fictions of England and South America with this as our basis, in much the same fashion as our discussion of 'snakes' in the last section.

To begin with, some more quotations from *Fan* may make the terms of debate clearer. Mary Starbrow, Fan's protector and (virtually) lover ('I love you now, and find it sweet to love you, as I have never loved any one of my own sex before'³⁷), is described as having a 'male-bird gait ... for with us, as with the birds, stately walk and beautiful plumage go together'³⁸. To increase incipient unease still further, one of her fits of temper is described thus:

³⁴Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.159.

³⁵W. H. Hudson, as 'Henry Harford', *Fan, The Story of a Young Girl's Life*, 3 vols (London, 1892), I, 71.

³⁶Hudson, *Fan*, I, 154-55.

³⁷Hudson, *Fan*, I, 127.

³⁸Hudson, *Fan*, I, 71.

Her face had changed to a livid white, and looked hard and pitiless, and her eyes had a fixed stony stare like those of a serpent ... from time to time her rage would rise to a kind of frenzy, and find expression in a voice strangely harsh and unnatural, deeper than a man's, and then suddenly rising to a shrill piercing key that startled Fan and made her tremble.³⁹

This is when she has had a disagreement with her (male) lover, and again emphasizes the masculine nature of her character - 'No tiger in the jungle maddened by the hunters has such strength as I felt in me then'⁴⁰. She vows not to forgive him:

Never - never - until his viper head has been crushed under my heel! ... Ah, how sweet to scorch the skin and make the handsome face loathsome to look at!⁴¹

It might then be not too gross a simplification to say that the snake here represents the masculine principle - that of rage and deception - while the 'guileless song-bird', in this woman-dominated novel, denotes feminine innocence. Certainly, when Fan begins to be tutored by a female atheist, Constance Churton - atheism being an aspect of 'unwomanly' intellectualism - her mother Mrs. Churton muses thus over the possible consequences:

Had she told this gentle human dove that she must learn the wisdom of a serpent *from* a serpent - a kind of Lamia who had assumed a beautiful female form for the purpose of instructing her?⁴²

Again, when Fan's wicked brother 'Arthur Eden' seeks to tempt her into an incestuous relationship with him, he invites her on an outing to the zoo:

In the snake-house a brilliant green tree-snake of extraordinary length was taken from its box by the keeper, and Eden wound it twice round her waist; and looking down on that living, coiling, grass-green sash, knowing that it was a serpent, and yet would do her no harm, she experienced a sensation of creepy delight, which

³⁹Hudson, *Fan*, I, 218.

⁴⁰Hudson, *Fan*, I, 221.

⁴¹Hudson, *Fan*, I, 219.

⁴²Hudson, *Fan*, I, 296.

was very novel, and curious, and mixed.⁴³

A 'sensation of creepy delight' is what the reader feels, too, when he observes the adroitness with which Hudson manages the rather morbid themes of Lesbian aggression (in Mary's case), incest (in 'Eden's' - a reference to Cain's wife?), and intellectual sterility (in Constance's). The narrative may be a little absurd, but it is notable that any impression it gives of a serious attempt to deal with these issues is achieved by covert manoeuvring of his favourite images: birds and snakes. The same dichotomy is revitalized by the use of fire (again linked to serpents) and water in another of his English fictions, 'Dead Man's Plack':

I am alone with my two friends which I have found, one out of doors, the other in - the river which runs at the bottom of the ground where I take my walks, and the fire I sit before ... This one I think is too ardent in his love - it would be terrible to be wrapped round in his fiery arms and feel his fiery mouth on mine. I should rather go to the other one to lie down on his pebbly bed, and give myself to him to hold me in his cool, shining arms and mix his green hair with my loosened hair.⁴⁴

Elfrida begins her career as the 'caged bird of pretty feathers' of Earl Athelwold, who must be ready with a 'sweet song to soothe him when he is tired'⁴⁵ - the 'Fan' motif; but her ambition soon leads her to transfer her affections to the King, Edgar:

His was the wisdom of the serpent combined with the gentleness - I will not say of the dove, but rather of the cat, our little tiger on the hearthrug, the most beautiful of four-footed things, so lithe, so soft, of so affectionate a disposition, yet capable when suddenly roused to anger of striking with lightning rapidity and rending the offender's flesh with its cruel, unsheathed claws.⁴⁶

Elfrida is beguiled by a serpent, whose cunning, however, proves to be matched by her own - but in old age, repenting her sins, she finds peace in her love for the

⁴³Hudson, *Fan*, II, 261.

⁴⁴Hudson, *Dead Man's Plack*, pp.26-27.

⁴⁵Hudson, *Dead Man's Plack*, p.26.

⁴⁶Hudson, *Dead Man's Plack*, pp.11-12.

girl Editha, symbolically identified with the river in the first quotation. When Elfrida is finally found drowned, 'it was as if she had fallen into the arms of the maiden who had in her thoughts become one with the stream - the saintly Editha through whose sacrifice and intercession she had been saved from death everlasting'⁴⁷. A platonic love, to be sure, but still (as in *Fan*) a love between women surpassing that of men.

The main impression one might get from this imagery is of a poverty of implication - birds as innocent doves (or strutting 'male-birds'), beguiled by serpents, and contrasted again with the qualities of 'fire and water'. Hudson's inability to portray the fruitful union of the two sexes is, to be sure, as apparent in *The Purple Land* as it is here, but somehow his 'pastoral' vision of shepherds (or gauchos) on the Pampas seems more playful and less didactic. It is not that *Fan* or 'Dead Man's Plack' are preaching sexual stereotyping - just that Hudson's imagination (and therefore his system of imagery) seems to move on a narrower track when he is no longer distracted by the 'orchestra' of impressions provided by the flora and fauna of South America.

One suggestion why this might be so is provided by Hudson's disagreement with Darwin in *Idle Days in Patagonia* over the true sources of fascination in the Patagonian plains. I have already quoted his remark that 'the grey, monotonous solitude woke other and deeper feelings [than wonder and admiration]', but it remains to record a further explanation of this phenomenon of 'memorableness':

We know that the more deeply our feelings are moved by any scene the more vivid and lasting will its image be in memory - a fact which accounts for the comparatively unfading character of the images that date back to the period of childhood, when we are most emotional.⁴⁸

Hudson claims to have here 'the secret of the persistence of Patagonian images', but I think we have here also the secret of the greater intricacy and resonance of his system of imagery when applied to South American than to English scenes. It is notable that his 'Proustian' image of total restoration of the past is applied once

⁴⁷Hudson, *Dead Man's Plack*, p.99.

⁴⁸Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.205.

to Patagonia and then, in *Far Away and Long Ago*, to his childhood on the Pampas. This, combined with the simple fact of the greater wealth of untamed South American nature - spelt out in Hudson's early poem 'A London Sparrow' (1883), where the birds of the metropolis inspire in him a desire to fly away home to the richer bird-haunts of Argentina - explains the contrast between 'a band ... of small wind instruments' and a full orchestra in the quotation above.

To establish the fact of this greater richness of response, let us look at the use of bird imagery in *Green Mansions*, where it is associated almost exclusively with Rima, the 'lustrous daughter of the Didi'⁴⁹ (spirits). The hero Abel's first encounter with her is through the agency of her song - 'a low strain of exquisite bird melody, wonderfully pure and expressive ... [whose] greatest charm was its resemblance to the human voice - a voice purified and brightened to something almost angelic'⁵⁰. After a while, though, he succeeds in getting a glance at the singer:

a girl form, reclining on the moss among the ferns and herbage, near the roots of a small tree. One arm was doubled behind her neck for her head to rest upon, while the other arm was held extended before her, the hand raised towards a small brown bird perched on a pendulous twig just behind its reach. She appeared to be playing with the bird, possibly amusing herself by trying to entice it on her hand ... From my position it was impossible to see her distinctly, yet I dared not move.⁵¹

The sense of gradual disclosure provided by these early parts of the book is most striking - first the song, then sight of her 'form' indistinctly juxtaposed on that of a 'small brown bird'. Finally, there is the meeting itself.

Abel picks up a stone to kill a snake, but is halted by the sudden irruption of the girl, accompanied by a 'torrent of ringing and to me inarticulate sounds in that unknown tongue'⁵². He promptly stops, and attempts to establish contact with her. She seems as curious, but withal as wary as he is, and when a 'swift,

⁴⁹Hudson, *Green Mansions*, p.80.

⁵⁰Hudson, *Green Mansions*, pp.38-39.

⁵¹Hudson, *Green Mansions*, pp.62-63.

⁵²Hudson, *Green Mansions*, p.73.

startled expression' comes into her eyes,

Thinking she had become alarmed and was on the point of escaping out of my hands, and fearing, above all things, to lose sight of her again so soon, I slipped my arm around her slender body to detain her, moving one foot at the same time to balance myself; and at that moment I felt a slight blow and a sharp burning sensation shoot into my leg, so sudden and intense that I dropped my arm, at the same time uttering a cry of pain, and recoiled one or two paces from her.⁵³

The ingenuity with which this scene is constructed is quite noteworthy. The pain is, of course, caused by the snake, which has taken the opportunity to attack its aggressor (an opening provided by his moving his foot). Symbolically, it also seems to stand for the 'Natural World's' defence of its sister Rima - who protects all the birds and animals in the forests round about, as the Indians have already told Abel (they regard her as a spirit). The snake can be seen on an allegorical level as well, as the personification of Abel's desire - perhaps not quite so innocent as he imagines. The 'poison' of lust, in other words; the serpent in the garden of Eden. Certainly his advent is the cause of Rima's downfall, though he suffers for it himself:

at last from the top of the tree, out of the green leaves, came a great cry, like the cry of a bird, 'Abel! Abel!' and then looking we saw something fall; through leaves and smoke and flame it fell like a great white bird killed with an arrow and falling to the earth, and fell into the flames beneath. And it was the daughter of the Didi, and she was burnt to ashes like a moth in the flames of a fire, and no one has ever heard or seen her since.⁵⁴

Fire again is opposed (though less mechanically in this case) to the peaceful spirit of the dove or 'great white bird'.

One important difference between the deployment of Hudson's favourite images in these passages from *Green Mansions* and the ones taken from *Fan* and 'Dead Man's Plack' is the fact that they can be more naturally evoked in the setting of South America. Rima lives in the woods, surrounded by wild birds and

⁵³Hudson, *Green Mansions*, pp.78-79.

⁵⁴Hudson, *Green Mansions*, pp.242-43.

snakes, whereas Fan has to visit the zoo in order to be fitted with a 'grass-green sash', and go to Kensington Gardens to see the birds. A certain sense of absurdity is never far off from these English scenes, whereas the greater alienness and strangeness of the Guianan jungle fits the symbolic nature of Hudson's fiction far better.

It might be objected that *Green Mansions* is simply a better written novel, and therefore disposes its images more skilfully. Undoubtedly to some extent this is the case, but this begs the question of why these novels differ so greatly in merit. At least one cause must surely be the greater imaginative stimulus provided by the South American landscape. To sum up, then, a good deal of Rima's effectiveness comes from the fact that 'there was a kind of mistiness in the figure which made it appear somewhat vague and distant, and a greenish grey seemed the prevailing colour'⁵⁵. In other words, the childhood associations which make one scene more memorable than another - the 'greenish grey' plains of Patagonia set against the fields of England - applies also to novel-settings. Rima must always seem far away from us in order to make her effect: at first in physical terms, when she is recognized solely by her song; and later through the strangeness of the lost culture she represents. Abel and she fall in love, but that love contains the seeds of their destruction - the embroidery of birds and snakes forms for once a relatively unobtrusive accompaniment to the emotional force of the narrative.

Extrapolating general principles from the specific set of associations connected with W. H. Hudson is perhaps a little risky, but it ought at least to be possible to say that - in the field of the Romance as a whole - the advantage of a South American setting is its closeness to archetypal, childhood images and associations: forests, birds and water, snakes and fire, which function as avatars of the larger forces in nature, rather than simple personifications of the masculine and feminine. English settings (in Hudson's case, at any rate) are also handicapped by the necessity of providing accurate descriptions in cases where one's accuracy can easily be checked - thus the Gissing-like realism of the early scenes of *Fan*, and the particularity of her experiences at the zoo; thus, too, the controversy with a

⁵⁵Hudson, *Green Mansions*, p.63.

'learned' Professor over the historical accuracy of Elfrida's story at the beginning of 'Dead Man's Plack', a case where he actually goes to the lengths of claiming a sort of spiritualist rapport with his subject in order to justify his conjectures. The distinction may be one of degree rather than of particulars, but it is no less tangible for that. South America, then, in a literal sense has become the 'metaphysical' landscape which we first detected in the works of John Masefield - susceptible to any imaginings that may be imposed on it; any imaginings, that is, which fit the twin conditions of forming part of their author's 'inner landscape', and the larger set of associations of the Pampas, Cordillera and Amazon in European tradition.

5.3 Green Mansions

Pastoral poetry,

has - and this is very important - a correlative scenery: pastoral Sicily, later Arcadia. But it also has a personnel of its own, which has its own social structure and thus constitutes a social microcosm: neatherds (whence the name bucolic), goatherds, shepherdesses, etc. Finally, the shepherd's world is linked to nature and to love. One can say that for two millennia it draws to itself the majority of erotic motifs. The Roman love elegy had a life span of but a few decades. It was little capable of development or renewal. But Arcadia was forever being rediscovered. This was possible because the stock of pastoral motifs was bound to no genre and to no poetic form.⁵⁶

Leaving aside the complex patterns detected at its heart by Empson and Northrop Frye, let us agree for the moment that one of the most basic constituents of Pastoral is the principle summed up in the words *Et in Arcadia ego* - the presence of death and decay at the heart of a paradisaal landscape. This is most effectively illustrated by Poussin's painting - distant vistas flanked with mountains, and, at the centre of the composition, a pair of shepherds contemplating a skull on top of a plinth. And, in fact, this is much the same image as that which inspired Hudson's story 'Dead Man's Plack' - suggested by the memorial for the death of Earl Athelwold in the forest where he was hunting.

The Arcadia that was, in Curtius's words, 'forever being rediscovered' was identified with the New World of South America from a very early date - its attraction being again that it was tied to 'no genre and to no poetic form'. It therefore suited the prose Romance, Hudson's preferred medium, as well as any other means of artistic expression - painting, drama, poetry or music. He seems to have felt that it went particularly well with the Pampas and the 'bucolic' gauchos, but also with Rima's 'tropical forest' (she too, after all, is a kind of shepherdess - only of wild animals and birds rather than goats and sheep). Hudson's South American version is slightly changed in particulars but remarkably faithful in implication. For the death's-head, he has a snake - symbol

⁵⁶Curtius, p.187.

both of lust and death: the two forces which must at all costs be excluded from pastoral stasis. Thus the chapter 'Materials for a Pastoral' near the beginning of *The Purple Land*, where the still innocent Richard Lamb finds shelter for the night with 'a very numerous family'⁵⁷ (including five pretty daughters - he is only driven away by some too virulent mosquitoes), is succeeded by the moral ambiguities of 'The Woman and the Serpent', where physical love begins to disturb the flirtatious equilibrium which he has contrived to create. (The same 'stock of pastoral motifs' can be paralleled in Sarmiento's *Facundo*, where the paradisaical wonders of Tucumán - in the interior of Argentina - are sullied by the irruption of the barbarian Facundo Quiroga:

Es Tucumán un país tropical, en donde la naturaleza ha hecho ostentación de sus más pomposas galas; es el edén de América, sin rival en toda la redondez de la tierra. Imaginaos los Andes cubiertos de un manto verdinegro de vegetación colosal, dejando escapar por debajo de la orla de este vestido doce ríos que corren a distancias iguales en dirección paralela, hasta que empiezan a inclinarse todos hacia un rumbo, y forman, reunidos, un canal, navegable que se aventura en el corazón de la América ... Los bosques que encubren la superficie del país son primitivos, pero en ellos las pompas de la India están revestidas de las gracias de la Grecia.

... ¿Creéis, por ventura, que esta descripción es plagiada de 'Las mil y una noches' u otros cuentos de hadas a la oriental?

... Facundo había ganado una de esas enramadas sombrías, acaso para meditar sobre lo que debía hacer con la pobre ciudad que había caído como una ardilla bajo la garra del león.⁵⁸)

⁵⁷ Hudson, *Romances*, p.28.

⁵⁸ Sarmiento, pp.180-82: 'Tucuman is a tropical country, where Nature has displayed its greatest pomp; it is the Eden of America, and without a rival on the surface of the earth. Imagine the Andes covered with a most luxuriant vegetation, from which escape twelve rivers at equal distances, flowing parallel to each other, until they converge and form a navigable stream, which reaches to the heart of South America ... Primeval forests cover the surface, and unite the gorgeousness of India with the beauties of Greece ... Perhaps one might believe this description to be taken from the "Thousand and One Nights," or other Eastern fairy tales ... Facundo went into one of these recesses formed by shady branches, perhaps to consider what he should do to the poor city fallen into his hands, like a squirrel into the paw of a lion.' (152-53). - Note the analogue here to Darwin's mention of 'the Arabian Nights' (quoted in Chapter Three, p.86); not to mention (to continue a line of argument from Chapter Four), the 'gringa' translator, Mrs. Horace Mann's alteration of Sarmiento's 'América' to 'South America'.

This is the pattern also (though on a more serious level) in *Green Mansions*, where Abel's attempt to teach the 'bird-girl' Rima about love results, indirectly, in her death. One imagines that this enshrines one of Hudson's own impressions of nature - the Naturalist's simultaneous desire to shoot and to spare his prey, as evidenced by his encounter with a 'Magellanic eagle-owl':

I scarcely had the heart to pull the trigger ... But I wanted that bird badly, and hardened my heart.⁵⁹

Rima was 'burnt to ashes like a moth in the flames of a fire' because of the inevitable corruption introduced into her life by Abel's love. Abel, in the Bible, is the innocent cause of harm. This one, too, intends no more than a dalliance between shepherd and shepherdess - but in fact rouses the rancour of the forest Indians to whom she is an enemy.

There seem, however, to be personal motives as well in Hudson's employment of Pastoral conventions. Hudson's young girl heroines must at all costs be prevented from becoming predatory, sexual women like Mary Starbrow in *Fan*, or the señora in *The Purple Land*. In the case of *Fan*, the protagonist of a conventional three-volume novel, this is achieved simply by ending the book at an arbitrary point. A more drastic solution can scarcely be avoided with the mysterious Rima, 'without doubt one of a distinct race which had existed in this little-known corner of the continent for thousands of generations, albeit now perhaps reduced to a small and dwindling remnant'⁶⁰ (a race, what is more, which was 'neither brown nor white' but of an 'indeterminable'⁶¹ tint). She must be sacrificed on the altar of her uniqueness. As the heroine of this particular Pastoral, she is constrained to more than other Chloes, Phyllises and Delias, whose problems are limited to the truth of shepherd's tongues. Rima is the spirit of pastoral nature itself, and as such can have no earthly bridegroom.

Classical Pastoral depends on being caught in the present - dalliance will lead to generation, and the seasons advance to winter and death - but, for the moment,

⁵⁹Hudson, *Idle Days*, pp.187-88.

⁶⁰Hudson, *Green Mansions*, p.76.

⁶¹Hudson, *Green Mansions*, p.63.

it is held in a magic summer, where the innocent tiffs of the shepherds and shepherdesses as yet merely prefigure the 'skull beneath the skin'. Hudson's images, too: birds that become snakes, girls that become women, fires that rend and destroy, can only be held in balance by an especial effort of the imagination - one that is granted by the combination of the natural scenes which were his predilection (the plains of Patagonia and the Pampas, the forests of Guiana and Venezuela) and the emotions invested in them by childhood memory. Hudson cannot bear to contemplate the poignancy of the decline of Fan or Rima (or Yoletta in *A Crystal Age*) into childbirth, drudgery and death (the fate of Rima's mother), but such a fate can only be temporarily held off even in this landscape of fantasy. It is Hudson's strength that he can use these emotions to good effect in his work, by attempting to make the processes of mortality and corruption more assimilable to himself (and his audience), as expressions of the general will of nature.

How strange to see this stolid, immutable creature ['Nature at home in England'] transformed beyond the seas into a flighty, capricious thing, that will not be wholly ruled by you, a beautiful wayward Undine, delighting you with her originality, and most lovable when she teases most; a being of extremes, always either in laughter or tears, a tyrant and a slave alternately; ... now cheerfully doing more than is required of her; anon the frantic vixen that buries her malignant teeth into the hand that strikes or caresses her ... A thousand strange tricks and surprises will she invent to molest him ['man']. In a hundred forms she will buzz in his ears and prick his flesh with stings; she will sicken him with the perfume of flowers, and poison him with sweet honey; and when he lies down to rest, she will startle him with the sudden apparition of a pair of lidless eyes and a flickering forked tongue.⁶²

Woman here achieves apotheosis as personified 'Nature' - and we see that Rima's reappearance as ghost (and guide) in the later pages of *Green Mansions*, while it cannot take away Abel's pain at her death, at least makes it clear that her spirit has some immortality in this form.

What is more, the contrast made here between 'Nature at home' (England) and 'Nature in South America' implies that this is a solution to the technical

⁶²Hudson, *Idle Days*, pp.85-87.

problem of preserving one's heroines inviolate which is only feasible in the latter setting. After all, if Nature is 'the only woman who can keep a secret, even from a lover'⁶³ - the secret being how one is to reconcile the innocence of love with the 'corruption' of sex, generation with death, the serpent with the dove - then the dilemma comes closest to being resolved for Hudson in this 'Romance of South America'.

In the next two chapters, we shall be looking at further implications of the process of 'romancing' South America, including aspects which have been rather downplayed here - such as the contrast between 'real' and 'imaginary' countries as fictional settings, and the associations between particular landscapes and specific types of narrative. It is hoped, however, that the theoretical overview required of this chapter in the context of the argument as a whole has not overpowered any sense of the interest and variety of Hudson's work both as Naturalist and novelist (at any rate, the baroque charm still exerted by *The Purple Land*, *El Ombú* and *Green Mansions*).

⁶³Hudson, *Idle Days*, p.30.

Chapter 6

Conrad and 'Costaguana'

6.1 Landscapes of Romance

6.1.1 Critical Modes

In a footnote to his biography of Joseph Conrad, Frederick R. Karl includes the following passage on the 'overlappings' in Conrad's fiction between the years 1899 and 1904:

Although listings are tedious, they do show a remarkable homogeneity. Clearly, there was a Conrad style, modality, even manner that entered into nearly everything he wrote in this busy period. Some analogies are:

1. Mob scenes of *Romance* and *Nostromo*, with some further reference to the clustered native scenes of *Lord Jim* and 'Heart of Darkness'; we note a basic shape to his milling groups or mobs.
2. Bay scene of *Romance* and the Gulf scene of *Nostromo*, with further reference to the becalmed yacht in *Rescue* and the drifting *Patna* in *Lord Jim*.
3. Narrative method: reliance on retrospective technique in 'Heart of Darkness,' *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, with similarities to the narrative technique of *Rescue*[.] Narrators overlap: Marlow, Kemp of *Romance*, Mitchell of *Nostromo*. Use of participatory narrator rather than simply impersonal post of observation.
- ... 6. Tensions, action vs. intense inactivity; adventure vs. torpor; need for movement vs. inability to move, passivity; struggle between will to power and need to rest, reflect, self-destruct.¹

It would be easy to object to particular points in this analysis. How, for example, does the 'bay scene' of *Romance* (1903) differ from that of *Victory* (1915) or *Suspense* (1925); or the drifting *Patna* from the *Melita/ Otago* in *The Shadow-Line* (1917)? In other words, how can such themes be regarded as generically linked to this period when they recur throughout Conrad's career?

¹Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives, A Biography* (London, 1979), pp.453-54.

Nor are they even specific to Conrad. The types of 'narrative method' listed can be paralleled in many other works of the period. 'Retrospective technique' functions (albeit on a fairly simple level) in Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886); and the 'participatory narrator' could hardly be taken further than in James's 'Turn of the Screw' (1898) or *The Sacred Font* (1901). This is not really the essence of what Karl is trying to establish, however - and he would be justified in rejecting such criticisms as a misunderstanding of his position.

That he himself, even so, is not entirely happy with this mode of criticism is attested to by the fact that he prefaces the note with a proviso ('Although listings are tedious'), and excludes it from the main body of his text. After all, with a net as wide as this, it is hard to see how one could not find parallelisms in so large a body of work - and if it were not for the fact that Karl's primary purpose is to detect echoes or illuminations of Conrad's life in his fiction, the procedure might be condemned outright. Nevertheless, the implications of his method of analysis are clear: it amounts to blurring the boundaries of a series of texts in the interests of charting the aesthetic consciousness of an author - the region where all his works are presumed to originate. In Roman Jakobson's terms, it takes the text as *metaphoric* rather than *metonymic*² - as illustrating a set of equivalences from work to work, rather than seeing it as a microcosm within which each of these elements has its own structural function. As a response to Conrad, then, it posits the incidents in his novels as echoes in the world of appearances of some archetype of 'unrest' or 'drifting' to be found fully represented only in his life.

There is however an alternative approach, just as extreme, to Conrad's fiction - as we can see in the following passage from E. M. W. Tillyard's book on *The Epic Strain in the English Novel*:

Those who admire *Nostromo* sufficiently to read it several times carefully are apt to grow interested in the details of the geography. It is hardly a critical interest like that in the book's geographical intensity; for instance the question whether the promontory of

²Roman Jakobson, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles', in *Fundamentals of Language*, by Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle (The Hague, 1956), pp.76-82 (p.81).

Azuera bounded the Golfo Placido on the north or on the south is not critical like the question whether the promontory itself captures our imagination. However, though indubitably marginal, interest in the geography of Costaguana can be a spontaneous growth which the critic is justified in serving provided he does not make it out to be other than it is. I have had the curiosity to plot out some of the geography of Costaguana, and I give my findings for the benefit of anyone similarly interested; but I do so in an appendix to make it clear that those findings are not 'criticism'.³

To continue our use of Jakobson's model, this method of examining the book (marginalized, again, from the main body of the text in an appendix) might be described as *metonymic* - using the geographical hints in the text as a pretext for charting an unknown country. This is, to an extent, what every reader of a predominantly realist text tends to do; but (as Tillyard rightly remarks), the critical question of the book's 'geographical intensity' - whether its details 'capture our imagination' - reflects more accurately the level on which readers tend to assimilate such items of information.

David Lodge remarks that 'a narrative text is always in a metonymic or synecdochic relation to the action it purports to imitate, selecting some details and suppressing (or deleting) many others'⁴, and goes on to explain that (in his understanding of the terms) 'Metonymies and synecdoches are *condensations* of contexture ... produced by deleting one or more items from a natural combination, but not the items which it would be most natural to omit'⁵. Tillyard can thus be seen to be expanding the deletions in the text of *Nostromo* - the entire action becoming, for him, a *synecdoche* for the world of Costaguana. He is forced to some extent to go against the grain of the text to do so - since Conrad's novel, being arranged for maximum rhetorical effect, deletes the most 'natural' (i.e. straightforwardly informative) items from its descriptions - but the fact that he is able to do it at all implies a certain concrete quality to this

³E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (London, 1958), p.199.

⁴David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature*, second impression (London, 1979), p.xiv.

⁵Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p.76.

particular 'region of Romance'.

It is not perhaps entirely just to characterize Karl and Tillyard's views in so extreme a way. A biographer, after all, has a certain licence to see important themes recurring in his subject's imaginative work (Karl clarifies his position by saying 'It is both dangerous and futile to read fiction as autobiography; but it is very fruitful to read fiction for the psychological preoccupations of an author at the time of composition'⁶). Tillyard, too, is explicit in rejecting any attempt to see his 'findings' as 'criticism'. Nevertheless, it seems to me that by treating the two passages I have quoted as the Scylla and Charybdis of *Nostromo* criticism, it may be possible to arrive at a more accurate idea of what we are doing when we try to analyze the implications of the setting (in this case, the imaginary country called 'Costaguana') in a novel of this type.

By doing so, it will be apparent that I am continuing the series of 'dialectic' pairings described at the opening of Chapter Five, but (as in the cases mentioned there), the picture must be complicated a little further before it becomes an adequate model for this purpose. I have attempted, so far, to situate Karl's method of criticism on Jakobson's axis of *selection*, associated principally with metaphorical tropes; and Tillyard's on the axis of *combination* and metonymy⁷. The readings of the text that these two methods of analysis encourage might, however, be described in philosophical terminology as, respectively, *epistemological* and *ontological*. Brian McHale defines these two terms (which he sees as dominating modernist and post-modernist writing), as follows:

the dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*. That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as ... 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?' Other typical modernist questions might be added: What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; ... What are

⁶Karl, p.668.

⁷As Jakobson puts it, 'Speech implies a selection of certain linguistic entities and their combination into linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity.' (quoted in Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p.74, where he compares 'combination' with the laws of fashion, and 'selection' with the choice of specific garments from subsets like footwear, tops, dresses, etc.).

the limits of the knowable?

... the dominant of postmodernist fiction is *ontological*. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like ... 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?' Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world it projects, for instance: What is a world?; ... What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?⁸

Karl's intention as a critic, as we have seen, is to illuminate the consciousness of his author - and it is for that reason that he highlights scenes, incidents, and attitudes which are common to a number of Conrad's works. The series of oppositions he sets up ('action vs. intense inactivity; adventure vs. torpor' and so on) are accordingly problems of consciousness within the text which can be made to reflect on the larger consciousness outside it. A character, for Karl, if not actually a metaphor for his creator, certainly embodies problems of knowledge and narration which only take on their full meaning on a 'wordly' level. In this sense, then, Karl's strategy can be seen to lead quite naturally to an epistemological reading of *Nostromo* - not so much a clash of worlds as a clash of views of the same world.

Tillyard, on the other hand, is concerned with 'the mode of existence' of the world projected by the text *Nostromo*. Problems of perception and consciousness within the narrative thus become, for him, secondary to the problem of which world the characters are inhabiting. Is it the colonized world of economic cause-and-effect represented by the financier Holroyd? The 'over-world' projected by the Olympian presence of Higueroa and the high Cordillera? Or the idealistic and ordered cosmos of Mrs. Gould? Each of these is a potentially solid entity which would seem to exclude the possibility of the others' existence. Is, then, the 'concreteness' of Costaguana (evidenced by Tillyard's cartography), merely the result of the legions of overlapping worlds which it contains?

⁸Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York and London, 1987), pp.9-10.

The epistemological and ontological readings of *Nostromo* may therefore be seen as the natural consequence of the respectively biographical and topographical approaches of Karl and Tillyard, and the tropes of 'metaphor' and 'metonymy' which they are accordingly driven to emphasize. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the tension between essentially textual problems of narration and point-of-view represented by the one, and extra-textual problems of consistency and solidity represented by the other, is an unavoidable one for any consideration of the role of setting in the novel. Indeed, it is difficult to see how such an inquiry could be carried out at all without some distinction being made between the *langue* and *parole* of the novel - the series of intellectual levels on which it conveys meaning, and the specific manifestation of that meaning in the imaginary state of Costaguana.

The discussion of this tension between text and world still lacks any real background, however, and I therefore propose in the next section to analyze a series of representative narratives from the late Victorian and Edwardian period - attempting in each case to diagnose their dependence on the landscapes in which they are placed (ranging from the fictitious kingdom of Ruritania to the 'realities' of London and Paris) - and, in the process, giving an idea of the intellectual and mimetic consensus on which Conrad drew to create *Nostromo*.

6.1.2 Seven Examples

In his preface to *Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson describes how, in company with a schoolboy:

I made the map of an island; it was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance *Treasure Island* ... as I pored upon my map ... the future characters of the book began to appear there visibly among imaginary woods; and their brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me from unexpected quarters, as they passed to and fro, fighting and hunting treasure, on these few square inches of a flat projection. The next thing I knew, I had some paper before me and was writing out a list of chapters.⁹

Not only, in fact, does the map appear to have inspired the book - it also dictated a large part of the action:

The map was the chief part of my plot. For instance, I had called an islet *Skeleton Island*, not knowing what I meant, seeking only for the immediate picturesque; and it was to justify this name that I broke into the gallery of Mr Poe and stole Flint's pointer. And in the same way, it was because I had made two harbours that the *Hispaniola* was sent on her wanderings with Israel Hands.¹⁰

It is tempting to see in this admission some cabalistic relationship between the schematic existence of a map and that of a novel - both of them paper *synecdoches* of the world, unreadable without a knowledge of the conventions of the form (the *reductio ad absurdum* of this position can be found in Borges' *El hacedor* (1960), where (possibly borrowing from 'The Hunting of the Snark' (1876)), he describes 'un Mapa del Imperio, que tenía el tamaño del Imperio y coincidía puntualmente con él. Menos Adictas al Estudio de la Cartografía, las Generaciones Sigüientes entendieron que ese dilatado Mapa era Inútil y ... lo entregaron a las Inclemencias del Sol y de los Inviernos. En los desiertos del Oeste perduran despedazadas Ruinas del Mapa, habitadas por Animales y por

⁹Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, Tusitala edition (London, n.d.), pp.xxv-vi. (I have silently corrected 'poured' to 'pored').

¹⁰Stevenson, p.xxx. (The reference to Poe is to an implied debt to 'The Gold Bug' (p.xxvii)).

Mendigos'¹¹ - the 'ontological' approach run riot). Stevenson himself delimits the functions of maps in a more prosaic fashion:

It is perhaps not often that a map figures so largely in a tale; yet it is always important. The author must know his countryside whether real or imaginary, like his hand; the distances, the points of the compass, the place of the sun's rising, the behaviour of the moon, should all be beyond cavil.¹²

The map, then, is an aid to visualizing the imaginary world of a novel - but it does not, in itself, constitute that world (just as Borges's life-size map is no substitute for the 'Empire' it hides from sight). Of course, in cases like Stevenson's, where the physical sketch-map itself has played a part in dictating the structure of the plot, it takes on an added significance - but even then its real function is as a metaphor for any writer's interior picture of the world that he is describing (it is noticeable that a map is often added to a book precisely because that picture has been so imperfectly conveyed to the reader - John Buchan's *The Courts of the Morning* (1929), for example, has no fewer than three maps of his imaginary republic of 'Olifa', while *Nostromo* includes none at all of Costaguana¹³).

Our project of considering the range of imaginary worlds available to a writer of Conrad's era will therefore only tangentially be aided by a consideration of their respective cartographies. Such 'mapping' does, however, have larger implications which it will be the task of this section to examine. The best way to accomplish this is, it seems to me, simply by listing seven prototypical *fin-de-siècle*

¹¹Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras completas*, 9 vols (Buenos Aires, 1965), IX, 103: 'a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point. Less attentive to the Study of Cartography, succeeding Generations came to judge a map of such Magnitude cumbersome, and ... abandoned it to the Rigours of sun and Rain. In the western Deserts, tattered Fragments of the Map are still to be found, Sheltering an occasional Beast or beggar'. (translations quoted from Jorge Luis Borges, *A Universal History of Infamy*, translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni (Harmondsworth, 1975) - page numbers thus (131)).

¹²Stevenson, pp.xxx-xxxi.

¹³Except for a brief sketch-map drawn for the author's own use, and not included in the published text. (Information from Eloise Knapp Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* (Chicago and London, 1963), p.173).

novels and looking at the role of the setting in each - in terms of the *era* in which each is set, the *sub-genre* to which it belongs (novel or Romance, for children or adults), and the *atmosphere* (exotic or domestic, 'swash-buckling' or oblique) which it seeks to convey¹⁴.

Our list, then, reads as follows:

1. *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson (1883)
2. *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, by William Morris (1891)
3. *The Prisoner of Zenda*, by Anthony Hope (1894)
4. *The Inheritors*, by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer (1901)
5. *The Grand Babylon Hotel*, by Arnold Bennett (1902)
6. *Romance*, by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer (1903)
7. *The Rescue*, by Joseph Conrad (1920)

It might be further broken down into *setting*, *era* and *sub-genre*, in accordance with the paradigm above (fictitious places will be found within inverted commas):

1. 'Skeleton Island' - 18th century - Boy's book
2. 'Cleveland by the Sea', 'The Isle of Ransom' and 'The Land of Living Men' - Heroic Age - Fantasy Romance
3. 'Ruritania' - Contemporary - Political Romance
4. Sussex, London and Paris - Contemporary - Scientific Romance
5. London - Contemporary - 'a Fantasia on Modern Themes'
6. The West Indies - early 19th century - Historical Romance
7. The East Indies - Contemporary - Colonial Romance

¹⁴This, too, brings problems in its train. How, for example, does one define the distinction (important at this date) between a 'novel' and a 'Romance'? And, if the intrigue of a book hinges on its alternation of action and inaction - or its avoidance of one expected plot-twist in favour of another - which can be said to be 'dominant' in the narrative? For the purposes of our argument, I will have to simplify my response to these knotty questions. To the first, I would reply that the distinction is simply a matter of degree - that Romance has a tendency towards exotic settings and wish-fulfilment, while the novel engages with concerns which are more intractably quotidian - but that one is seldom safe in classifying a particular example as one or the other, unless its author has given a lead. Similarly, in response to the second question, I have purposely confined myself to talking about the 'atmosphere' conveyed by the works under discussion - since this, though a somewhat subjective term, at least allows discussion of the complicated alternations and contradictions of mood from which such a feeling is made up.

As we have seen, Stevenson himself claims that the setting of *Treasure Island* generated the story ('The map was the chief part of my plot') - and while this statement cannot be taken entirely at face value, one can see that the participation of pirates dictates first an era (the 17th or 18th century), and then a general milieu ('The Spanish Main'). The fact that it is a book for boys means that erotic concerns cannot be foregrounded, and so the alternative theme of a boy's growth into manhood through a series of formative experiences and encounters - *Bildungsroman* - is employed instead. The story might have been placed in the present day - in which case the 'treasure island' would have served as a romantic contrast to everyday England - but this is too commonplace a structure for Stevenson. The essence of his book is its efficacy as a means of escaping into the past (the 18th century - very vaguely characterized) and into an exotic landscape ('Skeleton Island' and the *Hispaniola*). It is not that this is a particularly safe and comforting environment - in fact, it is nightmarish ('blind Pew') and dangerous (the ruthless Long John Silver) - but it is also exciting. In Conradian terms, then, *Treasure Island* stands for the element of romantic *frisson*, 'immediate picturesque', which one gets from the mere details, the 'harbours that pleased me like sonnets', of some 'blank' or little known part of the world¹⁵.

To go on to William Morris's *The Story of the Glittering Plain, or the Land of Living Men* (1891), the subsequent influence of Morris's prose Romances has depended to a large extent on the fact that they are set in an entirely imaginary world, which he makes little attempt to link historically with ours. This is not to say that his worlds are arbitrary. On the contrary, the 'Heroic Age' settings of this and others of his Romances (*The House of the Wolfings* (1888), *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890), and so on) in fact include many more-or-less plausible details from the Germanic past. They are blended, however, into a sort of amalgam of

¹⁵it was Africa ... that got cleared of the dull imaginary wonders of the dark ages, which were replaced by exciting spaces of white paper. Regions unknown! My imagination could depict to itself there worthy, adventurous and devoted men, nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there, and sometimes swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistently set on unveiling.' Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers', in *Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays* (London, 1972), pp. 1-21 (pp.13-14).

pre-Roman Gothic tribes, Vikings, and Icelandic society; in short, into the ideal 'essence' of Northernness, taken from all the sources known to Morris (*The Volsunga Saga*, *The Nibelungenlied*, *Beowulf*, Tacitus's *Germania*, and *The Elder Edda*). This is not historical, though, and not intended to be so - it is an aesthetically constructed world which includes all the most evocative features from various eras in our own. Morris's innovation lies in realizing that one does not have to provide a rigorous historical background for such flights of fancy. The *mise-en-scène* in *The Glittering Plain*, then, works on setting up a tension between the workaday heroic world of 'Cleveland by the sea', where Hallblithe is betrothed to the Hostage; the 'Isle of Ransom', the piratical island which he visits in company with his mysterious companion the Fox; and the 'Land of Living Men', the miraculous region where men and women enjoy perpetual youth, at the price of not being allowed to leave. All of these are sufficiently exotic to the reader, but the fact that the second inspires inhabitants of the first with fear and wonder, and the third awes inhabitants of the second, makes the three landscapes function together as a working model of a world. Their interrelationship prevents us from seeing any one of them as simply arbitrary, despite the 'fantastic' construction of each. (This tension operates too in *Nostromo*, where the snowy mountain Higuerota and the mysteries of the interior act as a gauge against which we measure first the 'paradise of snakes'¹⁶ of the San Tomé mine, and then the Europeanized society of Sulaco itself - the three levels of geography echoing three levels of perception in the narrative).

In *The Prisoner of Zenda*, by contrast, we have an imaginary European state, 'Ruritania', set in the midst of the contemporary world. The intrigue in Anthony Hope's book is both amorous and political - his hero is forced to impersonate the King of Ruritania, but this also entails falling in love with the royal fiancée. The appeal of the book is thus three-fold: on the one hand all the uniforms and colourful regalia of a Central European state, on the other hand an atmosphere of international tension and 'high life', and a love interest as the essential complement to both. None of these things would have been available to an author writing about a 'real' country - as this could not but be seen as a

¹⁶Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.116.

commentary on the contemporary condition of that state. One could, of course, retreat into the past - under the influence of Dumas and *The Three Musketeers* (1844) - but this would involve losing the element of everyday life, the sense that such a situation could befall any London clubman at any moment. Ruritania, of course, is largely a wish-fulfilment fantasy - but it is based on real (if romanticized) elements. Costaguana, similarly, is a reasonably plausible South American country - but the fact that the novel's plot hinges on internal politics makes it essential that it be an imaginary one. It contains, as has often been pointed out, elements of Chile, Paraguay and Venezuela - but unless Conrad had been interested in writing a *roman à clef*, there would be no point in making a closer identification with any particular country. A contemporary Romance that hinges on politics is (one is tempted to generalize) bound to be set in an 'imaginary' country - the only possible exceptions being 'novelizations' of topical events in particular places.

The next book we have to consider, *The Inheritors*, the first collaboration between Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer, is an attempt at a best-selling 'Wellsian' Romance. It was inspired directly by books like *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), with their *topos* of an ordinary English environment disrupted suddenly by an unexpected scientific advance. The 'inheritors' themselves never become sufficiently concrete for the reader to visualize them or their implications, nor does the rather involved and oblique style of narration help to convey this disruption - but in intention, Conrad and Hueffer's book too is intended to show the consequences of an unforeseen event, the irruption of beings from the Fourth Dimension into the contemporary world. The essence, then, of this sort of Romance is that it seems to be taking place 'anywhere' - but in fact its setting must be distinguished by a rather implausible ordinariness. Similarly, the people on whom it impinges cannot be too remarkable or interesting, or else the focus of the narrative will be deflected from an invasion by Martians, or by 'Dimensionists', or the existence of an invisible man, and onto the psychological processes of the characters.

This concept is carried even further in the next work we have to consider, Arnold Bennett's *The Grand Babylon Hotel*. This book, described as a 'fantasia' by its author to distinguish it from his novels of provincial life such as *Clayhanger*

(1910) and *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), combines the snobbish appeal of an aristocracy of wealth (the American millionaire Theodore Racksole is forced to buy the hotel of the title in order to obtain the dinner of his choice) with the more conventional aristocracy of birth (Racksole's daughter, Nella is being courted by a Prince Aribert of Posen). Contemporary reviewers noted the similarities with Anthony Hope (the plot concerns a conspiracy led by the 'King of Bosnia' to discredit his rival for the hand of 'an exalted German Princess'¹⁷). There is, indeed, a resemblance - but the fact that Bennett has set his book in London gives it an entirely different appeal from that of *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Of course, it is not the workaday face of London that is being emphasized (Bennett has no Wellsian 'ideas' which have to be highlighted over other aspects of the narrative) - rather, it is a hidden, select view of a city accessible only to the few: a world of luxury hotels, steam yachts and the other paraphernalia of Edwardian conspicuous consumption. These symbols of privilege drew a good deal of their mystique, however, from the fact that they were situated only a few feet away from the streets which Bennett's readers walked on every day, and yet were available only to those who were '*comme il faut*'. Like Chesterton in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904) or *The Man Who was Thursday* (1908), Bennett uses this sense of a secret world - or, rather, of a sudden shift of vision which can transform in an instant all one's presuppositions about the world one inhabits - to change London itself into a place of mystery. Conrad too employs from time to time the strategy of a sudden shift of perception to give an unanticipated new 'sense' of a scene (take, for example, the passage where Captain Mitchell, pacing up and down the wharf at night, is turned, in the space of a moment, into a spy and a conspirator¹⁸).

Romance, Conrad and Hueffer's second collaboration, has a number of features in common with *Treasure Island*. They are both set in the West Indies, and are both avowedly 'historical'. There, however, their kinship ends. *Romance* is set in the early years of the Napoleonic era, and is based on a certain amount of

¹⁷ Arnold Bennett: The Critical Heritage, edited by James Hepburn (London, 1981), pp.151-52.

¹⁸ Conrad, *Nostromo*, pp.281-83.

research into contemporary memoirs and journals¹⁹, unlike the essentially fantastic *Treasure Island. Romance*, besides, is an extremely self-conscious novel, hinging on a series of reflections on the nature of 'Romance' both as a quality and a literary genre:

Journeying in search of Romance - and that, after all, is our business in this world - is much like trying to catch the horizon. It lies a little distance before us, and a little distance behind - about as far as the eye can carry. One discovers that one has passed through it just as one passed what is to-day our horizon ... It lies either in the old days when we used to, or in the new days when we shall. I look back upon those days of mine, and little things remain, come back to me, assume an atmosphere, take significance, go to the making of a *temps jadis*. Probably, when I look back upon what is the dull, arid waste of to-day, it will be much the same.²⁰

In other words, the qualities that make an incident or a setting 'romantic' are by definition ungraspable - dependent upon its being slightly out of reach. This is definitely so in the case of Seraphina, the book's heroine, but also with most of its action, which seems almost deliberately out of focus and imprecise. The setting, for all its 'period' trappings, thus becomes subordinated to a theory of the novel - the idea that its strength lies in an evocation, above all, of memory; and that nothing is inherently 'romantic' in any other terms.

This idea is also tested in *The Rescue*, Conrad's self-proclaimed 'swan song of Romance'²¹. He gave as a reason for this judgement the book's 'concentrated colouring and tone'; and even thought of it as justifying his candidature for the Nobel Prize - though it is now regarded as one of his inferior later works. Its importance for us is two-fold. On the one hand, the book is interesting as a Romance of colonization - set, as it is, in the Malayan archipelago, and dealing with the conflicting aspirations of two races (seen in microcosm in the dilemmas of Tom Lingard, the captain of the *Lightning*). On the other hand, emphasis should also be laid on the time-scheme of the novel - and the effects of its

¹⁹Karl, pp.516-17.

²⁰Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer, *Romance* (London and Edinburgh, n.d.), p.56.

²¹Quoted in Karl, p.4.

inordinately long period of gestation (begun in 1896, it was not finished until 1919).

Taking the first of these aspects first, one of the first reviewers of *Almayer's Folly* (1895) commented that:

No novelist has yet annexed the island of Borneo - in itself almost a continent. But Mr. Joseph Conrad, a new writer, is about to make the attempt²².

This model of 'literature' advancing as a colonizing force immediately behind the physical armies of the European powers is as striking as it is disconcerting. Certainly it accords with the early view of Conrad as a sort of 'sea-Kipling', but it also explains to some extent the problematic relationship which he came to have not only with imperialism (though 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) makes a distinction between King Leopold's Congo and the 'vast amount of red' where 'some real work is done'²³, this remark appears to be ironic in context, as if Conrad (rather than Marlow) wished to imply that a close comparison might not be exclusively to the advantage of the latter), but also with the dictatorial powers of 'literature' itself. The idea of 'annexing' an area for literature, then, so glibly thrown out by the reviewer, must have filled Conrad with horror (as a close student of the corruptions of power as manifested in the Russian empire as well as the Congo).

Moving on to the second point, the time-scheme in *Nostromo* will be dealt with in more detail later in this essay, but for the moment it is interesting to note the way in which Conrad's 'Lingard' trilogy (*Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), and *The Rescue*) works in reverse chronological order - beginning with the end of a process, then some of its causes, and then (finally) returning to the youth of the principal character. The more-or-less 'contemporary' character of *Almayer's Folly* in 1895, drawing on Conrad's memories of the 1880s, means that each successive book gets further away in time - as if Lingard and Conrad were travelling away from each other at equal velocity, still linked by the fact that

²²Conrad: *The Critical Heritage*, edited by Norman Sherry (London, 1973), p.47.

²³Joseph Conrad, *Youth: A Narrative; Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether*, Everyman's Library (London, 1967), p.55.

it was Conrad's youth that Lingard was 'annexing'. *The Rescue*, then, like *Nostromo*, is a book which has a complex rapport with its creator's past - and while this may not have had quite so fruitful an effect in the latter case, it does to some extent back up its claim to be considered as the summation of 'Romance as a literary art'²⁴. It combines the exotic landscape and 'concentrated colouring' of its Eastern setting with the knowledge (first broached in *Romance*) that 'Romance' is, by definition, always at a remove - in the past; in the future; over the next hill.

To sum up, then, we have seen in our seven examples a cross-section of the generic motivations which prompted particular contemporary novelists to choose settings for their novels. It remains, therefore, to look at some more specific 'landscapes of South America' before combining these remarks with the theoretical discriminations made in the first section, and attempting a more general reading of *Nostromo* and the country Conrad created for his novel.

²⁴Karl, p.4.

6.2 Three South Americas

They travelled a great deal, seeking new taverns, for the highest attribute of a café singer will always be her novelty. They went to Mexico, their odd clothes wrapped up in the self-same shawl. They slept on beaches; they were whipped at Panama, and shipwrecked on some tiny Pacific islands plastered with the droppings of birds. They tramped through jungles delicately picking their way among snakes and beetles. They sold themselves out as harvesters in a hard season. Nothing in the world was very surprising to them.²⁵

This quotation, referring to the two characters 'Uncle Pio' and 'Camila', comes from Thornton Wilder's short novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927). The book hinges on an investigation of the criteria according to which God chose the five travellers who died when, 'On Friday noon, July the twentieth, 1714, the finest bridge in all Peru broke'²⁶, but, for our purposes, it is isolated passages like the above which are of most interest.

What precisely is it communicating to us? The single unified impression that it gives can, it seems to me, be divided into three distinct elements: *history*, *sentimentality*, and the *exotic*. Let us take them in order.

The single phrase 'they were whipped at Panama', added to the fact that we know the book to be set in the eighteenth century, the age of the Viceroy, gives us an impression of the past. It is not that whipping is unheard of in the modern world, or that being a 'café singer' has become an inherently respectable profession - it is simply that we, Wilder's readers, associate whipping with costume drama, and the contemptuous treatment of 'artists' by their patrons (Camila becomes, in the course of the novel, a great actress in the Spanish Classical Drama), with the era before Romanticism. Wilder's prose style is deliberately laconic, but the offhand way in which he brings up this point, 'they were whipped', in the midst of an account of their other travels and activities, attempts to give a sense of the triviality and unimportance of such an event in this

²⁵Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (London, 1947), p.131.

²⁶Wilder, p.11.

callous age. History, then - that is to say, the deliberate avoidance of 'modern' reactions to things like being whipped and sleeping rough - is a principal ingredient in Wilder's idealized picture of Golden Age Peru. He works at one level of complexity, removing obvious and recognisable anachronisms from his text, in the service of an even grosser simplification - the assumption that the attitudes and atmosphere of the past can be conveyed without some overt recognition by the writer of his own distance from them.

This leads, inevitably, to the sentimentality that bedevils Wilder's work. His book is an attractive one, because it depends on a generalized pathos which is implied to be 'unchanging' from age to age. Take, for example, the little understatement in this apparently 'objective' passage. For 'the highest attribute of a café singer will always be her novelty', read 'Poor Camila, forced to travel from place to place, unappreciated and underpaid'. 'Their odd clothes wrapped up in the self-same shawl' also gives the pair something of the air of a Dickensian couple - Nicholas Nickleby and Smike, or Little Nell and her grandfather - travelling about with all their possessions in common, huddling together for warmth against a cruel world. The theme of beleaguered innocence recurs, in fact, in virtually every sentence: 'They slept on beaches; they were whipped at Panama, and shipwrecked ... they tramped through jungles ... They sold themselves out as harvesters' (that 'sold' is very good - simply saying 'hired' would not give enough of an impression of the hardness of their lives). Saint Paul, in fact, was an amateur in suffering beside them; no wonder 'Nothing in the world was very strange to them'!

The sentimentality and superficial historical verisimilitude of Wilder's novel could perhaps explain its contemporary popularity - but the reason why it is still appealing seems to me to depend more on the air of the exotic exuded by it. It is not so much a Vernian delight in the detail of far-off places and peoples - rather a poetic evocation of something faded and dusty, an attenuated beauty which depends on distance for its charm. The simple phrase 'They went to Mexico' is already promising. It is not that Wilder offers us any characterization of colonial 'New Spain' - he can rely on his readers' already having a set of associations with the name. The fact, what is more, that this is a Mexico even further off - and therefore more exotic - than the country of which Westerners

dream²⁷ means that Wilder's restraint in offering us nothing except the detail 'They slept on beaches' (which may or may not refer to Mexico) gains in effectiveness. 'Beaches', at that period of the past, suggest (by association with Robinson Crusoe) 'shipwreck'. Thus we get the 'tiny Pacific islands plastered with the droppings of birds' - the perennial fascination of beach-combing. The contrast between 'jungle' and the 'delicacy' with which they pick their way among snakes and beetles is, to my mind, less adroitly handled - but it does make an obvious point about the simultaneous brute effect of endless jungle matched against the minute detail of each tree, plant and leaf. Finally, the 'hard season' during which they are forced to work as harvesters extends itself, by apposition, to apply to the entire past which they inhabit. Like the past of Europe, reached through John Masefield's 'Box of Delights', it is a time of strong colours and passions - passions which, however, always make sense in the present because that is where they really reside: a series of snapshots of another country's past displayed with the pretence of enlarging one's view of the world.

John Buchan, in *The Courts of the Morning*, depends similarly on overt subversion of one stereotype in order to establish another covertly:

There were no peasants to be seen, nor a single beggar; the Avenida de la Paz seemed to be kept as a promenade for big business and cultivated leisure. Archie grinned when he remembered the picture he had formed of Olifa, as a decadent blend of ancient Spain and second-rate modern Europe, with a vast wild hinterland pressing in upon its streets. The reality was as polished and secure as Paris - a reticent Paris, with a dash of Wall Street.²⁸

²⁷As in W. J. Turner's poem 'Romance':

When I was but thirteen or so
I went into a golden land,
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
Took me by the hand.

(Quoted from *The New Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1950*, edited by Helen Gardner (Oxford, 1985), p.898).

²⁸John Buchan, *The Courts of the Morning* (London and Edinburgh, 1949), p.51.

Buchan's 'Olifa', in fact, turns out to be a counterfeit of the Middle East at the time of the Arab revolt - with Sandy Arbuthnot cast as T. E. Lawrence (as in *Greenmantle* (1916)). The book is obviously intended as a copy - almost a parody - of *Nostromo*: landscape ('Gran Seco' for 'Sulaco'); chapter divisions ('The Gran Seco', 'The Courts of the Morning' and 'Olifa' for 'The Silver of the Mine', 'The Isabels' and 'The Lighthouse'); and even similar 'material interests' (copper for silver). Buchan in fact reviewed *Nostromo* quite favourably at the time of its first appearance²⁹, but (like 'Heart of Darkness', which he aped in *Prester John* (1910)) he obviously felt that the case for high finance and Wall Street could be put more favourably than Conrad's 'fatalism' allowed.

Archie's superficial impression of 'Olifa City' as looking 'as polished and secure as Paris' is, therefore, a mask - but the reality it hides (Castor's miners drugged by *astura* - like the 'assassins' of the Old Man of the Mountain³⁰; the armaments building up in the Gran Seco) is easily displaced by the benevolent intervention of the American financier Blenkiron (obviously intended to echo Conrad's protestant crusader Holroyd). At the book's end, and the end of the civil war sponsored by Buchan's heroes, the Olifans are on the point of inventing 'a new civilization in this continent, which will be a bridge between the old world and the new'³¹.

If we look again at the passage quoted above we will notice something of this superficial 'contemporary relevance'. The general impression of South America given by most Edwardian novelists and writers (Masefield as well as Conrad and Graham) is - in the cities, the clash between aristocratic, colonial *blancos* or Whites, and revolutionary, populist Reds; and in the country, flimsy enclaves of agrarian civilization set amidst the unconquerable jungle or 'cordillera'. Buchan, therefore, specifies that 'There were no peasants to be seen' - and has his hero 'grin' at 'the picture he had formed of Olifa, as a decadent blend of ancient Spain [the Blancos] and second-rate modern Europe [the Reds]'. It is, to be sure, a

²⁹Included in *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, pp.177-79.

³⁰Buchan, p.149.

³¹Buchan, p.463.

cliché - but a mythological one; one perpetuated as much by Latin American writers like García Márquez³² as Conrad and his contemporaries - so the main problem is what to replace it with. 'A reticent Paris - with a dash of Wall Street' is certainly a far less evocative alternative, as Buchan himself is the first to realize - but the 'real' face of the country which is masked by this façade is not really much better:

It's too big and badly put together, like a child's mud castle. There's cannibal fish, and every kind of noxious insect, and it's the happy home of poisons, and the people are as ugly as sin. The land isn't built according to our human scale, and I have no taste for nightmares.³³

This is one of Buchan's characters speaking rather than the author himself, but it applies just as well to the book he has written. The people 'as ugly as sin' might be seen as the victims of the sinister 'drug-régime' of Caster - while the 'home of poisons' refers to the 'Pais de Venenos' where the drugs come from, inhabited only by Indians immune to the poisonous vegetation and noxious fumes endemic to the region. It is all a little thin, even in context, and while Buchan's book is an enjoyable adventure story, it loses more than it gains by trying to debunk the traditional images associated with European myths of South America.

To illustrate this, let us consider a single aspect of the picture of South America provided by Conrad in *Nostromo* - his use of time. A great deal has already been written on this subject (I myself will be referring to the chronologies included in Ian Watt's introduction to the novel³⁴), but not, perhaps, from precisely this point of view.

The fact that every novel has a temporal as well as a spatial dimension somewhat complicates our attempt at defining the static picture it gives of a

³²As in the passage quoted by me in Chapter One, pp.30-31, where Aureliano Buendía's father-in-law explains to him the difference between Liberals and Conservatives.

³³Buchan, p.17.

³⁴Ian Watt, *Joseph Conrad: Nostromo*, Landmarks of World Literature (Cambridge, 1988), pp.vii-xv.

particular 'South America'. To define more clearly what I mean, let us look at the various levels of time in *Nostromo*. We can, to begin with, divide these into two: *real* time and *fictional* time. The first of these is the ordinary set of years and centuries which we all inhabit; the second the 'mirrored' version of this progression within Conrad's text. A further subdivision is necessary, however, in order to understand the implications of these different levels. *Real* time, then, can be divided into 'external' and 'Conradian' branches. The first of these refers to the historical record - accessible through books, newspapers, and other 'objective' versions of events. The second is Conrad's own experience - both his years at sea, and the actual time which elapsed during the composition of *Nostromo*.

Fictional time can also be divided up into 'actual' and 'perceived' time-scales. This is a distinction made famous by analyses of *Othello* - on the one hand we have the actual statements of characters about the weeks that have elapsed since they left Venice, and on the other hand the immensely shorter period (not more than a few days or a day and a half) seemingly taken up by the action itself³⁵. Similarly, in *Nostromo*, the chronology can be fairly exactly plotted from the indications given in the text (though the exercise is a little like Tillyard's attempt to map Sulaco). Ian Watt, in fact, tells us that the riot quelled by Nostromo and his *cargadores* took place on 1 May, 1890, and the silver was buried on Great Isabel before the break of day on 4 May. The frequent flashbacks, retrospective accounts by some of the protagonists (such as Decoud's letter to his sister or Mitchell's monologue in Chapter 10 of 'The Lighthouse'), and blendings of pluperfect and historic tenses mean, however, that these 'three days' seem to occupy an entire epoch in the country's history. This use of what Ford Madox Ford called the 'time-shift'³⁶ is not, of course, 'realistic' - but the very complications and confusions of this structure are intended to remind us that time is not linear in the way in which it reacts upon our consciousness. Conrad is

³⁵See *Shakespearean Tragedy*, by A. C. Bradley (London, 1904), pp.423-29, where he discusses the doctrine of 'Double Time, Short and Long', which is attributed to a certain 'Christopher North' (p.426).

³⁶*The Ford Madox Ford Reader*, edited by Sondra J. Stang (London, 1987), p.266.

doing no more than dramatizing this fact in stylized terms.

Having isolated our four levels, then, we must next scrutinize the ways in which they influence one another. Let us take a simple example - Conrad's own account of the 'experiences' on which the novel is founded:

I am dying over that cursed Nostromo thing. All my memories of Central America seem to slip away. I just had a glimpse 25 years ago - a short glance. That is not enough pour bâtir un roman dessus. And yet one must live.³⁷

Elsewhere he expanded this statement to say: 'In La Guayra as I went up the hill and had a distant view of Caracas I must have been 2 1/2 to 3 days. It's such a long time ago! And there was a few hours in a few other places on that dreary coast of Ven'la'³⁸ (referring to his trip to Martinique, Colombia and Venezuela aboard the *Saint-Antoine* in 1876). Finally, in a letter to Edmund Gosse written in 1918, he stated: 'Of course you have seen yourself that Sulaco is a synthetic product ... In the last instance I may say that Sulaco is intended for all South America in the seventh decade of the nineteenth century'³⁹. Ian Watt is forced to date the book in 1890 (following the example of Cedric Watts' *A Preface to Conrad* (1982)) because of some of its references to real events - notably the Atacama nitrate war of 1879 to 1884⁴⁰, but Conrad himself obviously associated it with the period of his first and only visit to the continent.

To complicate the picture further, there is evidence that external events in the years 1903 to 1904, during which he was composing the novel, influenced his treatment of events - above all, the American-sponsored Panamanian revolution of November 1903 (referred to in Chapter Four above), which brought about its independence from Colombia, and which appears to have had an effect on his treatment of Sulaco's similar secession from Costaguana⁴¹.

³⁷Conrad, *Letters to Graham*, p.145.

³⁸Quoted in Karl, p.143.

³⁹Quoted in Karl, p.812.

⁴⁰Watt, pp.19-20.

⁴¹Watt, p.10.

Nostromo, therefore, could be said to be set in 1876, if we take the date of Conrad's own visit to Colombia and Venezuela, and his statements to Gosse, as incontrovertible. Or, if we take more account of the external evidence of South American politics and wars (gleaned for the most part from an assortment of memoirs and reference books), we could, like Cedric Watts and Ian Watt, date it in 1890. Again, if we take its status as a 'mirror' of Conrad's own consciousness at the time of composition more seriously, we might date it to 1903-04. None of these dates is exactly wrong - but neither is any one of them entirely convincing. The truth of the matter is that, like the novel's internal structure, which subsists on the tension between the 'actual' and 'perceived' time-scales, Conrad's life and reading (though certainly separate in themselves), were reacting simultaneously upon the composition of the novel at any given moment. Thus, the impression given by time is crucial in both 'real' and 'fictional' terms. Conrad's 1876 visit was, for him, a long time in the past when he wrote the book: hence the novel's emphasis on being set in a period within living memory - with immediate rapports with the present - but which, nevertheless, existed now only in the recollections of the participants. Its political dimension was, for him (with the Panamanian secession), a present reality - thus the book's ingenious 'looping' in time, which leaves us with the three days of the revolution as the only tangible temporal certainty to which we can cling. In this way, Conrad's time-scheme accommodates both the 'distanced' feeling of an unattainable past sought by Thornton Wilder, and the somewhat factitious contemporary relevance of John Buchan.

The same complexity of vision, what is more, manifests itself in passages of description:

The undulating surface of the forests seemed powdered with pale gold dust; and away there, beyond Rincón, hidden from the town by two wooded spurs, the rocks of the San Tomé gorge, with the flat wall of the mountain itself crowned by gigantic ferns, took on warm tones of brown and yellow, with red rusty streaks, and the dark green clumps of bushes rooted in crevices. From the plain the stamp sheds and the houses of the mine appeared dark and small, high up, like the nests of birds clustered on the ledges of a cliff. The zigzag paths resembled faint tracings scratched on the wall of a cyclopean blockhouse. To the two *serenos* of the mine on patrol duty, strolling, carbine in hand, and watchful eyes, in the shade of the trees lining the stream near the bridge, Don Pepe, descending the path from the upper plateau, appeared no bigger

than a large beetle.⁴²

The actual components of this description are outlined in four sentences: the first giving a distant view of forests and the 'rocks of the San Tomé gorge'; the second picturing the 'houses of the mine' as they appear from the plain; the third comparing the paths down from the plateaus with 'faint tracings' scratched on a wall; and the fourth informing us both of the people (the 'two *serenos*') through whose eyes the scene is being directed, and the identity of the 'beetle' coming down the path. The interesting thing is that all four sentences are required in order for us to understand the full implications of this single event - the fact that Don Pepe is coming.

The passage, of course, conveys meaning on several levels - the reduction of vision implied by going from 'forests ... powdered with faint gold dust', by way of 'tracings scratched on the wall of a cyclopean blockhouse', to 'a large beetle' refers us to some larger scale of measurement beside which all the activities of the 'material interests' of Sulaco appear as trivial as insects on a wall. At the same time, the leisurely succession of phrases and periods ('away there, beyond Rincón, hidden from the town ..., the rocks of the San Tomé gorge, with the flat wall of the mountain') give us an almost exact syntactical equivalent to the sensation of things being in suspension - to a moment when the sun is overhead, and a distant traveller is approaching, and all motion and activity in the world seems to have stopped and to be awaiting his arrival. In the context of the novel, both of these effects seem inappropriate to the governing state of affairs. Don Pepe is preparing to ask the priest, Father Román, to take over the task of blowing up the mine (should it prove necessary), while he and all his workers march on the town. Events, in other words, have come to a head. And yet, in the eyes of the two *serenos*, we have a distant wooded gorge, some buildings the size of bird's nests, a scratch on the wall, and a large beetle.

The passage illustrates, above all, the careful way in which Conrad builds up not only the verisimilitude, but the solidity of his imaginary kingdom. In terms of

⁴²Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.334.

the narrative, we have Don Pepe descending a mountain in order to begin his march on the town; in terms of the actual description, we have a picture of how his approach appears in the eyes of two guards down on the plain - in terms of what the two together imply, however, we have the sense of a country whose existence does not depend solely on its function within a circumscribed plot. The expressions chosen do hint at a certain long range futlity in Don Pepe's mission ('Do you think that now the mine would march upon the town to save their Señor Administrador? Do you think that?'⁴³ - as Dr. Monygham, years later, exclaims to Mrs. Gould). They also convey, in this immediate context, a sense of the indifference of nature (usually personified as 'snowy Higuerota') to men and their mining and material schemes - but the strength of the passage as a whole is its ability to suggest, even in the thick of the action, a moment when things seem suddenly, magically, in balance. The physical disposition of the words is able to convey the sense of a reality that goes beyond them.

Conrad's *Nostromo*, as we have seen, originated in the blend of his own memories and his reading of accounts of South America. As we have also seen, the apparent 'reality' of this outside information is superseded by the internal logic of the novel itself. Its time-schemes, actual and perceived, are matched by the 'actual' and 'perceived' nature of the landscapes it describes. The San Tomé mine, as it comes up again and again, in different contexts and situations, turns into more than the sum of those parts - the evidence upon which we can draw to describe our 'sense' of that mine becomes as great as that which we possess for important features of our own lives. It is, therefore, for us (in the only sense in which we can understand the words), 'real'.

⁴³Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.423.

6.3 Nostromo

Of the seven books examined by us in the second section, two are set in entirely imaginary countries ('Ruritania' and 'Cleveland by the Sea'), while one - *Treasure Island* - includes the fictitious landscape of 'Skeleton Island' in its general picture of eighteenth century England. 'Olifa' and 'Costaguana' are fictional too, whereas the Colonial Peru of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is (in principle, at least) historical. The striking thing, for the purposes of our argument, is the extent to which this distinction proves to be a question of degree - since the 'hinterlands' of virtually all novels and Romances must contain some connections with the actual world, and since their foregrounds almost invariably include some elements of imaginary topography.

The motives for choosing particular settings are elaborate and by no means easily reducible to a set of formulae but, in the context of South America at any rate, it is notable that of *Green Mansions* and *Nostromo*, both published in the same year (1904), it is Hudson's 'Romance of the Tropical Forest' which confines itself to the actual forests of Venezuela and Guiana, whereas Conrad's 'Tale of the Seaboard' requires a fictional state as a backdrop⁴⁴. In other words, for the purposes of such exotic 'South American' landscapes, the countryside is sufficiently anonymous (Jungles, Plains, Rivers, Mountains) to remain 'real', whereas ports and coastal cities are too particular to be left unidentified. As I pointed out with regard to Ruritania above, using existing names commits one to a putative *roman à clef*, so the only alternatives are to leave the setting unspecified (within a larger unit such as 'Europe' or 'Latin America'), or to invent a new name - and with it, if one is conscientious, an entire polity⁴⁵.

Returning to the critical distinctions made in Section 1 between the 'epistemological' and 'ontological' readings of *Nostromo*, it now seems to me that we are in a position (at least temporarily), to prefer the latter over the former as a guide to this particular set of problems - how the solidity of Conrad's 'imaginary'

⁴⁴See my Appendices One and Two for a listing of 'imaginary' and 'real' settings in fictions of South America.

⁴⁵Examples of both of these solutions are to be found in Appendix One.

South America differs from the *reality* of, say, Thornton Wilder's. I shall accordingly be employing the hypothetical picture of *Nostromo* as a series of worlds - interlocking but not mutually reconcilable - suggested in the earlier characterizations of E. M. W. Tillyard as the 'dominant' for this discussion.

Conrad himself, discussing the origins of the book in his preface, says:

It was only when it dawned upon me that the purloiner of the treasure need not necessarily be a confirmed rogue, that he could be even a man of character, an actor, and possibly a victim in the changing scenes of a revolution, it was only then that I had the first vision of a twilight country which was to become the province of Sulaco, with its high shadowy Sierra and its misty Campo for mute witnesses of events flowing from the passions of men⁴⁶.

The topographical nature of this metaphor is striking - an idea about how to treat a character being immediately translated into the first sight of a countryside. The 'Sierra' and 'Campo', to be sure, are anthropomorphized, assumed to be capable of acting as 'witnesses of events'; but we find here already a crucial distinction being made between Conrad's 'vision of a twilight country', and that country's eventual transformation into the concrete 'province of Sulaco', with its own set of attributes.

The next summary we get of the nature of the country (and, by extension, of the novel) comes from the American tycoon Holroyd:

His [Charles Gould's] uncle went into politics, was the last Provincial President of Sulaco, and got shot after a battle. His father was a prominent businessman in Sta Marta, tried to keep clear of their politics, and died ruined after a lot of revolutions. And that's your Costaguana in a nutshell.⁴⁷

All that this paradigm shares with the last is a common concern with the nature of revolution, which both Holroyd and Conrad assume to be an endemic phenomenon of South America. Ian Watt mentions the shortening of 'Sta Marta' as evidence of hasty revision on Conrad's part⁴⁸, but it seems to me to denote, in

⁴⁶Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.31.

⁴⁷Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.97.

⁴⁸Watt, p.29.

context, a 'suppression' of certain crucial elements of the word - echoing Holroyd's blindness to anything but the economic and business realities of a country (as Mrs. Gould remarks, of his countrymen, 'Can it be that they really wish to become, for an immense consideration, drawers of water and hewers of wood to all the countries and nations of the earth?'⁴⁹). It is perhaps the most manifestly inadequate response to the complexities of Costaguana, but it is by no means easily refuted - being, one might almost say, eventually victorious in the dialectical war of 'conceptions of the country' which is at the root of the Costaguanan revolution.

And, continuing this political theme, let us examine the opinions of the *boulevardier* Martin Decoud on the subject of the nature of Costaguana:

She won't leave Sulaco for my sake, therefore Sulaco must leave the rest of the Republic to its fate. Nothing could be clearer than that. I like a clearly defined situation. I cannot part with Antonia, therefore the one and indivisible Republic of Costaguana must be made to part with its western province. Fortunately it happens to be also a sound policy.⁵⁰

This might be taken merely as evidence of the levity of Decoud's intentions - of his view of the country as consisting of 'an atmosphere of *opéra bouffe* in which all the comic business of stage statesmen, brigands, etc., etc., all their farcical stealing, intriguing, and stabbing is done in dead earnest. It is screamingly funny, the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe'⁵¹. In an 'epistemological' reading of this kind we might see Decoud as representing fatalism, Holroyd as materialism, and Mrs. Gould as idealism. This seems to ignore certain other aspects of Decoud's position, however. His decision to divide the country rather than part with Antonia is couched in terms of wilful paradox - but it is, nevertheless, a perfectly reasonable reading of the nature of countries and the world. For Decoud, nothing must seem to be being taken seriously - even his love for Antonia - but the idea that a person can mean more to one than a country is not a particularly surprising one.

⁴⁹Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.90.

⁵⁰Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.200.

⁵¹Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.152.

Decoud is not a solipsist - he is a realist ('I like a clearly defined situation'). He knows that the countries could be divided, and sees a number of reasons why they should. The fact that his prescription is fulfilled is, again, evidence of the strength of this idea. Nor is the suggestion that the country's 'essence' or 'real identity' remains untouched by such manoeuvring a valid one. Costaguana can change; that is, for Decoud, sufficient reason why it should.

A more mystic view of the country's nature is embodied in Mrs. Gould:

Mrs Gould, with each day's journey, seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns, a great land of plain and mountain and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a pathetic immobility of patience.⁵²

No-one, surely, is naive enough to suggest that the Holroyds of this world act with the motive of making the countries they exploit prosperous - nor would it be easy to believe that political division of the type represented by Decoud effects any essential change (except perhaps for the worse) in the state of the 'suffering and mute' masses. Mrs. Gould's insight, therefore, is into a different aspect of the country - but one that, by its very gravity, asserts its preeminent importance. Holroyd, Decoud, and Mrs. Gould do not refute one another, but they do demand that one make a choice between these different models - emphasizing that one's vision of the country cannot be held in suspension from ideological commitment.

Just such aloofness is attempted by Dr. Monygham, who sums up his view by saying:

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back.⁵³

⁵²Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.102.

⁵³Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.423.

Edward Garnett, acting on the suggestion of Cunningham Graham, proposed that this should stand as the book's epigraph - since it seemed to him to contain its entire message⁵⁴. Again, however, while this statement effectively removes the mask from the sophistries of other positions, it proposes no alternative attitude towards the problem - contenting itself with a half-hearted invocation of 'moral principle'. Perhaps the best answer to Monygham's perplexity is to contrast it with that of Charles Gould, the very symbol of 'material interests'.

It is no longer a Paradise of snakes. We have brought mankind into it, and we cannot turn our backs upon them to go and begin a new life elsewhere.⁵⁵

The burden of this discussion has been to point out that, while none of these views could be said to be entirely adequate to the complexity of the novel, there is something more involved in them than simply a series of failures to come up to the 'reality' of Costaguana. Each one is, in fact, a reality already - a coherent microcosm, with a consciousness at the centre and the universe stretching around. The fact that Conrad's view, too (as expressed in his preface), can be interpreted as just another 'version' of the country serves to emphasize that, in the final analysis, any attempt to separate the mapping of Costaguana and its inhabitants from the aesthetic constraints of the novel in which they are contained is futile. The country's complexities are not simply echoed by, but in fact are the complexities of the novel. The two aspects are not contradictory, however: the ontological and epistemological readings are simply the longitudinal and transverse arms of the same graph. In other words, for any given incident in the novel one must look at both the historical and literary constraints on Conrad himself, and the structural effect of this feature in context - the two together going to make up this 'world' which even Conrad seems to regard as a reality to be contemplated, rather than an artefact to be accounted for.

This point applies also to our earlier analyses of prototypical Romances, but the distinctiveness of *Nostromo* lies in the fact that this graph of the metaphorical

⁵⁴Conrad, *Letters to Graham*, p.159.

⁵⁵Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.195.

and metonymic 'arms' of representation applies within its narrative structure, as well as without. In, for example, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, we see each incident as evidence of a particular attitude or predilection on the part of the author, but also as a 'metonymic' feature of the book's internal world. In *Nostromo*, on the other hand, while this paradigm still applies, we have - in the 'world-views' identified with the names Holroyd, Decoud, Mrs. Gould and Dr. Monygham - an alternative set of personalities shaping the choice of incidents, and an alternative set of features building up into coherent worlds. Each character thus becomes a little author, and each world - Holroyd's, Mrs. Gould's and Dr. Monygham's - a miniature of *Nostromo* itself. John Buchan attempted a facetious version of it in 'Archie's' peroration on the nature of Olifa, but there is no substitute for the 'tremendous disclosure of this interior'; so comprehensively imagined a version of South America that it is 'unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast'.

Chapter 7

Masefield and the Quest

7.1 Sard Harker

In his autobiography, *Little Wilson and Big God* (1987), Anthony Burgess mentions encountering the following question in his examination for the 'Customs and Excise' service:

Give the ingredients of a rattling good yarn, with reference to either *Redgauntlet*, *The Four Feathers*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, or *Sard Harker*.¹

Habituated to the subtleties of Hopkins and Joyce, he was unable to make much of the challenge.

In a similar vein, Stephen Medcalf, reviewing William Golding's latest novel for the *TLS*, remarks in an aside of *The Bird of Dawning* (1933):

although like others of Masefield's novels it contains one passage as good as anything in English literature, the encounter of an open boat with a great wave - the story as a whole maintains no depth of excitement under the excitement of event.²

These two comments combine to give a fairly accurate picture of the received opinion on Masefield's fiction: that it has no depth of implication under the 'excitement of event', and that its virtues - readability, pace, suspense - are essentially those of the 'rattling good yarn' or adventure story. Even if one were to acknowledge this to be so, it might still be argued that his work was worthy of consideration as an unselfconscious mirror of the prejudices and presuppositions of his era - the very preference for such superficial 'yarns' being a datum in itself. It would, however, be premature to make any such assumption before testing this view of Masefield against the evidence of one of his texts.

¹*Little Wilson and Big God: Being the First Part of the Confessions of Anthony Burgess* (Harmondsworth, 1988), p.162.

²Stephen Medcalf, Review of *Fire Down Below*, by William Golding, *TLS*, 17 March 1989, 267-68 (p.267).

I have therefore chosen in this chapter to examine *Sard Harker*, one of the two books mentioned above, and the first of his trilogy of novels set in 'Santa Barbara', an imaginary country on the 'Sugar Coast' of South America. This has the advantage of combining our consideration of Masfield's fictional strategies with a charting of the view of South America implied by these three works (in order, *Sard Harker*, *Odtaa* and *The Taking of the Gry* (1934)). The method I shall be pursuing will be the cataloguing of the surface 'South American' aspects of the novel, followed by a discussion of their function in context (whether it be narrative, thematic, topographical, or a combination of the three).

In the progress of the argument so far, then, this can be seen as a natural continuation of the inquiry made in the last two chapters into the relationship between fiction (popular or otherwise), and the settings chosen for it - specifically, in this case, 'real' and 'imaginary' versions of South America. Let us begin by listing the selected features one after the other.

7.1.1 Mimicry

Sard took the sheet of coarse yellowish paper printed in blunt old type which had once printed praise of Maximilian. He read from it as follows:

'Feast of Pugilism.
At three o'clock punctually.
Grand display of the Antique Athletic.
Contests with the gloves for the decisions.
The Light-Weights, the Middle-Weights,
The World Famous Heavy-Weights.
At three o'clock, punctually.
At three o'clock, punctually.
Six contests of the three rounds for the Champions
of Las Palomas
For the Belt of the Victor.
To be followed by a Contest Supreme.
Twenty Rounds. Twenty Rounds.
Twenty Three-Minute Rounds.³

This boxing match does play a part in the development of the book's plot, since it is there that Sard overhears a conversation threatening the abduction of a 'Mrs. Kingsborough' from a house out of town, but the entire poster would not need to be reproduced simply for that reason. It demonstrates very well, though, one of the most obvious 'surface' characteristics of Masfield's text - its obsession with oddities of speech and diction.

The villains whom Sard hears plotting at the match, for example, speak in a strange argot composed of slang and fragments of verse:

Yah, you dirty Carib,

Knocky, knocky neethy
On your big front teethy.

That's what's coming to you in one dollar's worth. The royal order of the K.O., or else a boot you'll feel for as long as you can sit.⁴

³John Masfield, Sard Harker: A Novel (London, 1924), p.33.

⁴Masfield, Sard, p.43.

Other interesting phrases employed by them include: 'This is God's country: it ain't going to be any black man's not while little 'Arry Wiskey is on the tapis'; 'he'll have about as much show as a cat in hell without claws. When it's peace, he has a show, but when it's war, he's got to go'; and 'you may listen and you may glisten, but you'll go where the nightshade twineth if you put the cross on little 'Arry Wiskey'⁵.

Overall, one does indeed get from all this the impression of an overheard conversation - of a series of propositions *à propos* of nothing easily discernible - but there is also a prodigal richness about 'Mr Wiskey's' verbal fantasias. The rhetorical devices which he employs include *inversion* ('a boot you'll feel for as long as you can sit'); *internal rhyme* ('you may listen and you may glisten', 'he has a show ... he's got to go'); *deliberate archaisms*, both in a punning sense ('on the tapis' for 'on the floor'), and for redundant poetic effect ('you'll go where the nightshade twineth'); and *elaborated metaphors* ('he'll have as much show as a cat in hell without claws' replaces the simple 'as much chance as a cat in hell').

When a number of these techniques are combined in one short phrase - such as 'you may listen and you may glisten, but you'll go where the nightshade twineth if you put the cross on little 'Arry Wiskey' - they do indeed seem to rise 'to a kind of song'⁶, as Sard himself puts it. A strong sense of speech rhythm is supplied by the rhetorical triplet 'you may ... and you may ... but you'll go'; and 'the nightshade twineth', in context, justifies the pun on 'cross' immediately following - both 'making the (personified) Mr Wiskey cross', and 'putting the cross on someone's grave' (where it can be entwined by nightshade). The basic strategy, however, is that of substituting a periphrasis for each stage in a straightforward syntactical structure: 'you may do what you like, but you'll regret it if you anger me'. 'Me' becomes the third person 'little 'Arry Wiskey'; 'regret' is translated into an elaborate metaphor for death; and 'do what you like' becomes a play on words referring to earlier snatches of conversation about the palm-oil used by negroes on their skin ('glisten'), and the possibility of any of their near

⁵Masefield, *Sard*, pp.41-42.

⁶Masefield, *Sard*, p.41.

neighbours (Sard, for instance) understanding what is being said ('listen').

I have devoted so much time to this analysis in order to demonstrate the complexity and sophistication of this 'thieves' jargon'. It may communicate the atmosphere of half-comprehended, somehow threatening snatches of conversation, but its tropes appear also to be aesthetically self-sufficient - to display their wealth of linguistic invention for its own sake. This is the constant tension running through all the verbal pyrotechnics recorded by Masefield in his novel - on the one hand they give a powerful sense of the 'alienness' of the environment which his hero is seeking to explore, on the other they seem simply to record Masefield's own love of puns, pastiche, and conflicting registers of speech (a taste which can be clearly discerned in his letters and other writings not intended for publication⁷).

The boxing poster from which I have quoted above illustrates the same tension in a slightly different way. The hyperbole and verbal flights of fancy here are attempts to echo the characteristic rhythms of Spanish as they appear to an English speaker: A 'Feast of Pugilism', for example, instead of a boxing match; the redundancy of 'Contests with the gloves for the decisions'; and the constant repetitions of 'At three o'clock, punctually', which engender suspense by their very clumsiness. It is not just Spanish which Masefield hopes to evoke, however (which distinguishes him from Hemingway's attempts to echo its syntax in *For*

⁷Take, for example, the following passages from Letters to Reyna, edited by William Buchan (London, 1983) - a set of letters written to a young lady violinist. They range from verse parody (p.118):

My yongē brightē fresshē mayden dere
That fiddleth so that joy it is to here,
Swete gentil-hart Reyna, yow I mene
(As thesē wysē Spaniards clepen Quene)

to anecdote: 'Two young American ladies came to see [Victor Hugo] one day, & VH said to his interpreter, "What say these Ladies?" ... The Ladies said that "they were just tickled to death to meet him". VH still somewhat puzzled, asked again, "What say these ladies?" The interpreter said, "Master, they say, that they salute the Eagle of the World." After that, probably, all went well' (p.175); or mere persiflage: 'I fear you must often have shuddered, seeing a packet from me, & thought: "O, yet another 20 pounder: farewell my bow hand, welcome neuritis and the end."' (p.178).

Whom the Bell Tolls (1940)), but this particular kind of Spanish - in 'an old type which had once printed praise of Maximilian' (a fairly effective distancing gesture), in a Caribbean coastal town, for a contest of no merit between two unknown boxers. This 'Grand Display of the Antique Athletic' is overblown even by Spanish standards, as Masfield suggests in his quasi-Eliotic repetition of the portentous drumroll 'Twenty Rounds. Twenty Rounds./ Twenty Three-Minute Rounds'.

Again, then, the sober intention of suggesting the style of Spanish, insofar as that is possible in English, is subverted by Masfield's own linguistic exuberance. A speech, for him, can never simply serve a structural role - it must be composed and elaborated for its own sake (a good example is in his essay on Chaucer, where the simple idea of illustrating some different kinds of verse narration leads him to compose a series of Homeric, Dantesque, Wordsworthian, and dramatic versions of 'the Cat sat on the Mat'⁸). This spirit - not just of mimicry, but of exaggeration and parody - is what gives his texts their primary quality of verbal excess. Whether it can be called, for the most part, a virtue or a vice depends on its effect in the context of the narrative - but for that we will have to consider some further features of Masfield's novel.

⁸John Masfield, *Chaucer* (Cambridge, 1931), pp.8-12. They range from an imitation of the *Divine Comedy*:

Within that seventh circle of red hell
There came what seem'd a squeak, and looking near,
Lo, a black-visaged Cat, exceeding fell,
Who on the shadow of a Rat made cheer.

which concludes with the sage reflection 'This is the end of too much love of cheese' (p.11); to 'The dramatic way. Curtain rising discovers Rat. Enter Cat.'

Pounce. Ow! Curtain.

(p.12).

7.1.2 Peculiarities of Character

They were no longer of this world, nor conscious of it: they went dancing back to the kitchen, with hallelujahs. A jar or pot boiled over as they entered, with an overwhelming wash of splutter and crackle. A flood of smoke shot up from the mess with a smell of burnt dinner. Ramón seized the offending pot and cast it on the floor, singing:

'Never mind the little things, happy Ramón,
The little things of this world, happy Ramón,
For you have seen the joyous, happy Ramón,
Lady in the blue skirt, happy Ramón.
But, oh, the Lord, the saucepan burn my
fingers!'⁹

Tío Ramón and *Tía* Eusebia, the old black servants of Margaret and Hilary Kingsborough, have just seen a vision of the Virgin Mary 'near the forest edge'¹⁰, and are trying to tell their employers about it. The two *gringos* 'watched the dance from the kitchen door. They had heard that miraculous visitations were quite frequent along the coast and that when they came they filled the lives of those visited for two days'¹¹.

This religious fervour, which makes the old couple useless for anything until it has burned out, is useful to the narrative, in that it allows the villains introduced earlier to abduct Margaret Kingsborough with maximum ease - but it seems, again, a little surplus to requirements. It gives Masfield a chance to let himself go with some really rousing and lunatic 'spirituals' (such as:

'There shines the Lord.'
'O, the little glittering feet!'
'I see the long white beard of Father Abraham.'
'Oh, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost, the Holy
Ghost.'
'Halle-halle-halle-hallelujah'¹²),

⁹Masfield, *Sard*, p.92.

¹⁰Masfield, *Sard*, p.91.

¹¹Masfield, *Sard*, p.92.

¹²Masfield, *Sard*, p.93.

but it seems otherwise a fairly blatant piece of racial stereotyping.

If we go on a bit, though, we find a 'plump young woman, just beginning to grow fat ... [whose] mouth was exceedingly good-natured'¹³ - a help rather than a hindrance to Sard - who is characterized in just as extreme a fashion.

'Assuredly,' she said. 'It is true, then, as they say, that the English are as ice. "Assuredly." You said it with a peck, as from a beak. "Assuredly." If I were to take a dagger and thrust it into my heart so that I fell dead, you would say "Assuredly she has driven the point too far. Assuredly she is no longer alive."' ¹⁴

This woman, whose name is 'Clara of the Salt-Pans' but who prefers to be known as 'Rose of the South' (in opposition to Margaret - Margarita - Kingsborough, who turns out really to be called 'Juanita de la Torre'¹⁵), is as much of a stereotype of the good-natured, passionate Spanish woman as the two servants are of black religious enthusiasts - but since the business about 'Assuredly' is more effective as parody of the English than of their Latin neighbours, one is forced to conclude that Masefield is playing with the stereotype rather than simply endorsing it. And, if we continue to examine the various 'types' encountered by Sard on his progress across the continent - Smugglers ('there were cries of "Narker"! "Put it on him, George!" "I set he was a spy, py Gott!" "Hay que matarle!" etc.'¹⁶); Bandits ("Here I am, old Pappa Peppy, and I'm as drunk as I want to be. Come on out, Martin, Tomás, Ramón, Espinello, for I tell you I'm not Pappa Peppy, but an avenging angel of the Day of Doom ..." And at this he let fly with two revolvers at the doors of the huts'¹⁷); and Sailors ashore ('We're not making any row, you young pup; go and lap milk in a tea-joint ... I've torn a man's trousers off for less; dammy, the sea's that refined nowadays it's chronic'¹⁸) - we find that the satire is at least evenly spread.

¹³Masefield, *Sard*, p.137.

¹⁴Masefield, *Sard*, p.140.

¹⁵Masefield, *Sard*, p.314.

¹⁶Masefield, *Sard*, p.148

¹⁷Masefield, *Sard*, p.236.

¹⁸Masefield, *Sard*, p.270.

What one is driven, finally, to acknowledge is that Masfield uses his linguistic creativity as a means of distinguishing these various characters, otherwise liable to be blurred into a single confused picture of 'lower-class' insobriety and violence. The stereotype, then, works as a tool for composition rather than as a vehicle of racist ideology. In order for Masfield to chart the peculiarities of his new land, he must have some means of classifying the diverse features and peoples he finds there; and the one he has chosen (perhaps the only effective one) is to exaggerate their habits and appearance, and reflect this exaggeration in the individuality and exuberance of their speech.

The two servants whom we started with, therefore, far from reflecting Masfield's prejudices, reveal the efficacy of this method. Religious fervour - from the Virgin of Guadalupe, to the ancient Jaguar cults of the Andes, to the frightening rituals of *candomblé* (Brazilian voodoo) - is one of our principal associations, as Westerners, with South America; and it could hardly be more neatly critiqued than in this small vignette. Take the principal feature of the scene - the fact that the two Kingsboroughs are looking on in wonder at this display, and assuming that it will all be over in 'two days'.

'So they have seen the Virgin,' Margaret said. 'They will need us no more to-night.'¹⁹

The gap between theory and practice in the Kingsboroughs' view of their religion is made apparent here - they see no way in which this alleged vision could impinge upon them, and assume it as a matter of course to be a temporary aberration. This might not seem an unreasonable line to take, under the circumstances - but it is a little more difficult to sustain when one already assents, as they do, to the whole medley of miracles of the Catholic Church. Masfield points the moral even more obviously by making Margaret's abductor a devil-worshipper, and one who seems actually to possess supernatural powers. Sard, too, is helped in his quest by visions and dreams.

The way in which the old couple is presented - entirely from the outside, with no insight into their thought processes except that provided by their own speech

¹⁹Masfield, *Sard*, p.92.

and the tacit reaction of the two Europeans - is therefore more complex in implication than the 'surface' phenomenon which it at first appears to be. The same is true of the other classes of people portrayed in the novel - we have, always, the evidence of their own register of language and of one of the central characters' (Sard, Margarita, Hilary's) reactions to them - but the clash between the two, between the stereotype and its fulfilment, always leaves a gap which precludes too hasty or doctrinaire an interpretation.

7.1.3 Landscapes

Half a mile up the cañon he stopped, for in front of him the walls of the cañon drew together, and there at each side of the chasm the rock had been hewn into a semblance of columns, a hundred feet high. Drawing a little nearer, he saw that the heads of the columns were carved with the heads of monsters which were crushing human skulls between their teeth; blood seemed to be flowing from their mouths; blood spattered the columns; as he drew near, he could hear it dripping on the rocks below. The noise of the great bird, or whatever it was, had been silent for some time; now he heard it much nearer and with a new note, not of joy nor of sorrow, but of laughter that had no feeling in it. Sard stopped; he felt his hair stand on end, while his heart seemed to come up into his throat and thump there till it was as dry as bone.²⁰

We have looked at the somewhat disproportionate verbal invention of Masefield's characters' speech, and seen that it embodies a tension between the demands of narrative context and its author's own taste in hyperbole; we have gone on to see that same exaggeration justified as a means of defining individual character in an alien society. Now, however, it is time to consider the most apparently 'surface' characteristic of all - Masefield's treatment of the South American landscape.

Immediately we are met with a paradox - Masefield's characters are all surface glitter: tricks of speech which leave the inner self inviolate; his landscapes, on the other hand, could hardly be more anthropomorphic and subjective. Take the one described above. It is true that it is a striking scene - more striking, perhaps, because Masefield delays an explanation of the columns spattered with blood. It is, though, a relentlessly 'Sard's eye' view - even the delay corresponds to his own delay in formulating an explanation:

'They're only those streams,' he said, 'with iron ore or with red pigment in them, and they've led them in channels to those figures' mouths. That's all it is.'²¹

When we go through the rest of the passage we find a similar concentration on

²⁰Masefield, *Sard*, p.213.

²¹Masefield, *Sard*, p.213.

the stance of the central character at every point. 'He stopped' - because 'in front of him the walls ... drew together'. It is true that it is the walls that halted him, but their drawing together is syntactically predicated on his stopping. Further on, 'Drawing a little nearer, he saw ...' - and we, too, are allowed to see - the 'heads of monsters ... crushing human skulls'. Then, 'as he drew near, he could hear ...'; sound is added to our vision as Sard comes near enough to hear the blood dripping down. One sound recalls another, and Sard suddenly begins to hear again the 'strange, metallic cry' which preoccupied him a page before:

Sard's mind offered many suggestions, one after the other. Now it was like some great bell, but it was not a bell. Now it was like some ringing true blow struck by a gigantic tuning-fork, or like the blow of an axe upon a gong, or like the drilling of some gigantic woodpecker into a musical wood. He could not think what it was.²²

'He could not think what it was' - and therefore 'it' remains unformulated until he can think what it is. For the moment, it resembles 'laughter that had no feeling in it'. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that in this landscape, objects do in fact exist only to the extent that they can be formulated by an observer. 'That's all it is', Sard concludes his explanation of the streams of blood, but the passage continues: 'It was all that it was, but in the dusk of the cañon and of the day, to one very weak and weary as well as feverish, it was enough'²³.

Similarly, when he discovers that 'the noise of the great bird' is in fact 'the wind striking sharp angles in the rocks at the chasm top', he sums up:

'Those Indians spoke the truth,' he thought, 'when they said that the gods speak in music from dusk to dawn.'²⁴

This explanation is meant no more figuratively than the earlier ones about a bell or a woodpecker - the landscape is perceived by Sard in an animistic way, as either helping or hindering his passage, but it is perceived by us a literal 'objective

²²Masefield, Sard, pp.211-12.

²³Masefield, Sard, p.213.

²⁴Masefield, Sard, p.214.

correlative' of Sard's mental landscape. 'His heart seemed to come up into his throat and thump there till it was as dry as bone' is Sard's echo of the dryness and the 'ringing true blows' of the bird's voice. The whole cañon, furthermore, arises in response to Sard's thought, "'Here ... I may come upon some unknown beast or bird or race of men or giants, for there may be anything in a place like this'"²⁵.

This sense of 'double exposure' about the landscapes in *Sard Harker* - the fact that they can only be perceived from Sard's point of view, and yet seem to be simultaneously dictated by his state of mind - is nowhere clearer than in the famous passage in which Sard attempts to make his way across a swamp. For ten pages of the novel, he is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with what is little more than an overflowing ditch. The disproportionate length of this passage, given its lack of importance in the narrative, has caused it to be regarded (like the 'great wave' passage in *The Bird of Dawning*), both as a showcase of Masfield's talent at description, and an example of his failure to master the architectonics of the novel-form. To me, however, the textual intractability of Masfield's description of the struggle with the swamp is supposed to echo in all respects its role in Sard's journey.

It is, at first, intended as a short-cut:

He judged that the sea beach would be about half a mile from him and that he would save at least three-quarters of a mile by going by the beach.²⁶

The fact that Sard is attempting to rejoin his ship before it sails, having tried (unsuccessfully) to warn the Kingsboroughs of their peril, imparts an added tension to this monstrously misjudged device for saving time. The reader too is anxious to know what has become of Margaret, and is therefore equally frustrated by the lack of success of this manoeuvre. The disproportionate difficulty Sard finds in negotiating his short-cut therefore matches the disproportionate length at which it is narrated (both character and reader being slow to perceive that, far from being a detour, the heart of the struggle is here).

²⁵Masfield, *Sard*, p.213.

²⁶Masfield, *Sard*, p.117.

As Sard comes closer and closer to being drowned, his only desire is to regain his ship (he does not know that Margarita has already been kidnapped). He is saved, however, by a 'spray of xicale flowers [which] came floundering down from above, into his face'²⁷ (the flower is linked with Margarita, who lives in a villa called 'Los Xicales'). The reader too does not realize that by being deflected a hundred times - by being frustrated on every side and led on a mad dash through the heart of the continent, Sard will finally manage to be in time to save his lover, and that the supernatural aid of dreams and flowers is more significant in this drama than quotidian details of ships and sailing-times. Sard's lack of knowledge, then, is echoed by the lack of knowledge of the reader - and the arid, threatening nature of the landscapes which he encounters, landscapes which seem created only to serve as an obstacle to him, can be explained by the fact that they are precisely that. They are *narrative* obstacles to too hasty a resolution - and their beauty and terror (the beauty and terror of South America itself) is a reflection of the fact that the journey is as important as the destination: that the success of such a Romance depends as much on the intrinsic interest of its parts as on the ingenuity of its conclusion.

It is perhaps not exaggerating the case too much to say that Masfield presents language objectively and landscape subjectively because he has more faith in the former than the latter. Sard's world is shaped by his own thought processes - and by the language in which they are couched - both from Sard's point of view (the order in which they appear) and ours (the ways in which tangible things - the swamp, the cañon, the flowers - seem to echo the state of his soul). The landscapes in the book, then, operate on three levels: as anthropomorphic obstacles to Sard; as narrative frustrations to the reader; and as hints at an overall perception of landscape as language (not I think too 'post-modern' a sentiment to attribute to Masfield, under the circumstances).

²⁷ Masfield, Sard, p.128.

7.1.4 Small Town Paranoia

Sard felt that they knew that he was there, and that they were looking for him. Then he felt that though they were men, they wanted some of the senses of men; they were like some race of men born blind, who felt for their enemies by some sense which men no longer have ... They seemed to feel the ground and lift samples of it, then they muttered remarks about the samples ... Sard could hear their mutterings and a discussion going on among them. Evidently they had come upon his trail and were puzzled about it.

For a few moments the thought of dealing with a race of giants was unnerving. He saw how such a race could live in that land in the great caves of the limestone, coming out only at night into the wilder places of the hills, taking their prey and going back before dawn. Then he thought, 'They cannot be men, they must be bears. But if they are bears it won't be any better. They can only be grizzly bears who attack any man on sight.'²⁸

On one level, this quotation illustrates what was said in the last section - the way in which Sard's perceptions govern his environment. The bears become bears, for all intents and purposes, at the moment when he names them as such²⁹. What it actually represents for our purposes is, however, rather different. It shows the ever present sense of threat and alienation which dogs the progress of the entire story.

This overriding atmosphere - and all the features listed so far contribute to it in some way: the brittle strangeness of Masfield's mimicked speech; the arbitrary, illogical fury of the strangers Sard encounters; and (above all) the literal 'hostility' of the landscape - is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the episode where Sard,

²⁸Masfield, *Sard*, p.203.

²⁹This contention is backed up by the fact that a similar passage can be found in Masfield's early novel *A Book of Discoveries* (London, 1910), pp.104-05:

They had a moment's wild hope that, by staying up late, they might conceivably, somewhere, see a few woaded creatures, slinking from dens on the hills to rob a hen-roost, and slinking back, silent as the grave, furtive, going in Indian file, dodging from tree to tree out of the moonlight, leaving no footmarks, stealthier than animals, dreading the sun.

Only here it concerns the last surviving ancient Britons.

having arrived in the mining town of 'Tlotoatin' by train, is arrested for no reason at all.

'We desire no proof, since we need none. You were on the line, that suffices; without papers, which clinches it. You are arrested.'

... If he had resisted, perhaps if he had said another word, they would have shot him and pitched him down a disused working. Sard knew that the silver escorts were apt to shoot to save trouble.³⁰

As Sard is led away, he hears the crowd (mostly 'mestizos or Indios') begin to pass judgement on the 'bandit':

'Ha, dirty thief, to the gallows!'

'Ho, Englishman, it is not so easy to rob our silver: we are not your Africans from whom you may rob gold.'

'Englishman, the garota: cluck-cluck!'

'They say he killed seven before being taken.'

'He? An Englishman? They were asleep, covered in their blankets. He stabbed them sleeping.'

'Hear you, he killed seven, sleeping.'³¹

So, from a stranger just arrived in town, Sard has become (in the eyes of the populace) a murderer and a thief in just a few minutes. He does finally manage to escape from their jail, but not before having it brought home to him that in a town as remote as this, reality is what the inhabitants choose to call it. They can do exactly what they want - execute him, rob him (whether it be in the guise of a fine or a bribe), or let him go - and there is no-one to whom he can appeal. He has, in short, become a criminal ("I'm suspect without a hat," he thought, "and I am also guilty of train-trespass and prison-breaking"³²). Who is to say that these

³⁰Masefield, Sard, p.170.

³¹Masefield, Sard, p.171.

³²Masefield, Sard, p.187.

are not capital offences in Tlotoatin?

The cell was lit by the omission of one block of adobe just under the eaves at the back. Sard could just see out of this hole by standing on tiptoe. He saw a patch of sandy soil which had been channelled and pitted by people wanting sand; rats were humping about in this among refuse tipped there from the barracks. Beyond the sandy strip and distant about 120 yards was the railway, with its platform, water tank, fuel heap, and the legend

Tlotoatin.

Beyond this was the desert reaching to infinity³³.

'Round the decay/ Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare/ The lone and level sands stretch far away'³⁴. Masefield has put his finger on perhaps the most potent fear of the Romantic age. Associated with the cult of wildness, of solitude, of space - comes the terror of formlessness and meaninglessness. It is not that Sard has no purpose in crossing this desert (though he does not yet realize that it is to save Margarita that this series of 'coincidental' detours has been arranged) - but the purpose is so attenuated that it may, at any moment, dry up and leave him alone in the middle of a wilderness, or (worse still) in the hands of the citizens of Tlotoatin.

The basic, existential fear at which Masefield hints in these passages, is conveyed by a skilful interweaving of a number of the features which we have already discussed. Take, for example, the chorus of 'taunts' quoted above - the techniques used include, again, *inversion* ('Hear you, he killed seven, sleeping'); '*Spanish*' *word-order* ('we are not your Africans from whom you may rob gold'); and *onomatopoeia* ('Englishman, the garota: cluck-cluck!'); all of which culminate in a sort of *sylogistic syntax*, one assertion providing grounds for the next ('He? An Englishman? They were asleep, covered in their blankets. He stabbed them sleeping.'). It is the groundlessness of these remarks that makes

³³Masefield *Sard*, pp.174-75.

³⁴Shelley, 'Ozymandias', in John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Complete Poetical Works*, Modern Library (New York, n.d.), p.589.

them so unsettling - the fact that they are entirely self-generating. One man says that the Englishman has killed seven; the next says that they must have been asleep to be so easily defeated; and the next proclaims this as the official reason for the arrest. It is hard to think of a more overt way in which the 'surface' nature of Masfield's rhetorical tropes could justify itself - it is a mode of speech which creates meanings out of nothing, and which is frightening because it acknowledges no other basis for meaning.

I could go on to analyze the similar use of character in this context - the instinctive suspicion and low cunning of the prison guards, always on the lookout for a trick - and the masterly employment of features of description such as the 'rats ... humping about' among the refuse; but this would be to elaborate the point which has already been made. It is the surface glitter, the lack of any 'depth of implication' - which we noted as the principal objections to Masfield's fiction at the beginning of this chapter - that make it possible for him to substantiate this threatening, alienating view of South America.

From the basic stereotypes associated with the region - feigning, flowery speech; stubborn but 'picturesque' characters; frightening emptiness combined with scenic grandeur - Masfield has made a narrative structure whose implications go beyond mere evocation of the spirit associated by him and his readers with the two words 'South America'. The continent itself has become, for him, the quintessential 'landscape of the mind' - inscrutable in all its aspects, and therefore demanding more or less arbitrary interpretation every minute. Such dislocation of a solid basis for meaning must be a frightening thing - and this too Masfield acknowledges, and echoes in his parable of the bears, where the sudden realization that it is not a race of giants that he has to deal with is followed by Sard's wary proviso: 'But if they are bears it won't be any better'.

7.2 Tenor

We have, therefore, gone some way towards answering the question with which we started - whether Burgess' and Medcalf's strictures on Masfield were entirely justified - but it still remains to discuss what, if it is not a 'rattling good yarn' concerned solely with the 'excitement of event', *Sard Harker* actually is. I have already suggested that it employs a number of conventionalized features of South America in order to problematize our view not only of that continent but of the nature of all such 'mental landscapes'. I now propose to extend that insight, and - employing, in a slightly modified sense, I. A. Richard's terms 'tenor' and 'vehicle' (defined by David Lodge as words 'coined ... to distinguish the two elements in a metaphor or simile. In "Ships ploughed the sea", "Ships' movement" is the tenor and "plough" the vehicle'³⁵) - to look first at the book's 'tenor', its significance, in Masfield's own creative life; and then its 'vehicle', the sub-genre to which it belongs (in this case, the Romantic Quest - a genre already discussed in the opening section of Chapter Three).

A novel might be said to be an unusually extended metaphor - and the factors which animate it may not, as a result, be immediately apparent without reference to other writings and verbal expressions of its author. For example, one small detail from the passages already quoted from *Sard Harker* seems to me to contain the key to the reconstruction of the evolution of Masfield's feelings towards South America. I refer to the sentence in his description of 'Tlotoatin':

He saw a patch of sandy soil which had been channelled and pitted by people wanting sand; rats were humping about in this among refuse tipped there from the barracks.

In April 1894, Masfield sailed from Cardiff as junior apprentice aboard the *Gilcruix*, a four-masted barque with a cargo of coal-dust for Chile. He was sixteen years old, and this was his first (and last) voyage as a merchant seaman. The thirteen week passage, including thirty-two days of bad weather going around Cape Horn, seems to have been fairly miserable - especially being 'never warm

³⁵Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p.75.

nor dry, nor full nor rested'³⁶ - a feeling reflected in his narrative poem *Dauber* (1912). In any case, when they arrived at Iquique, the main nitrate port of Chile, he fell ill, 'smitten by sunstroke' - although 'it seems that he also suffered some kind of nervous breakdown'³⁷. He was classified as a Distressed British Seaman, or 'D.B.S', and sent to the British Hospital in Valparaiso, having been discharged from his ship.

It is this hospital which provides the frame for one of his early short stories, 'The Yarn of Lanky Job', which includes a most revealing passage:

The place we chose for our yarns was among lilies, under a thorn tree which bore a fragrant white blossom not unlike a tiny rose. When we were seated in our chairs we could see the city far below us, and that perfect bay with the ships and Aconcagua snowy in the distance. A few yards away, beyond a low green hedge where the quick green lizards darted, was a barren patch, a sort of rat warren, populous with rats as big as rabbits. I was getting well of a sunstroke and my nerves were shaken, and the sight of these beasts scattering to their burrows was very horrible to me ... My comrade watched me shudder as a rat crept through the hedge in search of food.³⁸

The story itself would be of little concern were it not for the fact that it is obviously inspired by these rats and their 'rat warren'. It tells of a sailor who falls into the sea and is picked up by a 'big ship, black as pitch, with heavy red sails', which turns out to be the 'rat flag-ship, whose boats row every sea, picking up the rats as they leave ships going to sink'³⁹. There are one or two nice details, such as the decks being 'ropy with their tails'⁴⁰, but for the most part it is a straightforward sea yarn - typical of Masfield at this stage in his career. In combination with the description of the hospital and the bay, however, it becomes

³⁶Quoted in Constance Babington Smith, *John Masfield, A Life* (Oxford, 1978), p.27. (All biographical information comes from Babington Smith, unless otherwise stated).

³⁷Babington Smith, p.29.

³⁸Quoted in Babington Smith, pp.29-30. (Interestingly, this passage was omitted when the story was reprinted in book form in *A Mainsail Haul* (1905)).

³⁹John Masfield, *A Mainsail Haul* (London, 1918), pp.33-35.

⁴⁰Masfield, *Mainsail Haul*, p.34.

rather an interesting piece of work.

On the one hand we have the careful setting of the scene - among lilies, with the 'fragrance' of thorn blossoms providing a little haven; an impression seconded by the magnificent view of the 'perfect bay' and its snow-capped volcano. This whiteness (snow, lilies, blossoms) is contrasted, through the medium of a 'low green hedge where the quick green lizards darted', with the dusty brown hues of the 'barren patch' full of rats. This three-fold 'colouring' is matched by the combination - suggested by the syntactical structure of the passage - of the beautiful landscape ('that perfect bay with the ships'); the horror of the rats ('a sort of rat warren, populous with rats as big as rabbits'); and Masfield's own feelings of sickness and debility ('I was getting well of a sunstroke and my nerves were shaken'). To elaborate the point a little further, one might say that the 'sterility' of white (the hospital) is filtered through the 'quick green' of everyday life to produce, in this state of illness, a pathological view of the 'barrenness' and horror of natural processes.

I do not insist upon every detail of this reading, but I would maintain that, taken together with the story, we have here the first clear example of Masfield's use of an image or correlative to express, and thereby exorcise, an impression or a feeling. To return to the sentence from *Sard Harker* quoted above, the odd syntax of the expression 'rats were humping about in this among refuse tipped there from the barracks', together with the expressive (and ambiguous) word 'humping' itself, make doubly sure that readers will pause at this point. To be sure, there seems no immediate reason, beyond the fact that they both concern rats, to connect this passage with the one from 'The Yarn of Lanky Job' - but when it is looked at more closely, the link seems much more plausible.

What, for example, is the setting for Sard's observation of the rats? He is in prison, looking out of a gap in the wall at 'a patch of sandy soil which had been channelled and pitted by people wanting sand'. Beyond this there is the railway, a sign saying 'Tlotoatin', and then 'the desert reaching to infinity'. In other words, we have a three-fold structure: observer, Sard, in jail; sand pitted by people and rats; and railway, sign, and desert. I have already discussed this passage in terms of Romantic fear of formlessness, but it seems that there may be

more to it than simply a Pascal-like expression of terror at the infinite. In short, then, I would propose that the phrase about the 'people wanting sand' is intended to associate them with the futilely 'humping' rats - that however good their reasons may be for collecting sand (for building, perhaps? or baths?), they are intended to seem like scurrying rodents, imbued with malevolence and little else. The railway, of course, is the way out - but it is blocked by the 'legend' of the town's name (a name brilliantly chosen to give a sense of total desuetude - an Indian tongue-twister like 'Tenochtitlán' or 'Toltec', without even the dubious 'Europeanness' of coastal towns like Las Palomas or Santa Barbara). The key to the puzzle is, however, Sard himself. Like Masfield convalescing in his Chilean hospital, Sard's 'nerves are shaken' - he has been poisoned by a stingray, half-drowned by a swamp, run for miles, and fought with smugglers and guards, before being thrown into prison at the end of an uncomfortable train ride. He can be forgiven for taking a slightly jaundiced view of things. The equation of rats with people, therefore, is his - just as the seeming 'infinity' of the desert is his response to the prospect either of staying in this accursed town, or attempting, somehow, to escape. Both appear to mean certain death.

I do not, in saying that this is Sard's view, mean to imply that we are intended, as readers, to censure him for his narrow-mindedness - the intention is, rather, to give us an entirely subjective angle on South America; one which, in Ford Madox Ford's words, will combine absolute 'accuracy as to impressions'⁴¹ with indifference to (alleged) facts.

What Masfield means to give us in *Sard Harker* is his South America, not a generalized travelogue complete with every feature familiar from the films. More, it is his intention to portray for us - as accurately as he can - the particular range of human sensations associated by him with South America: in this case, illness, the futility of life in such a landscape, and the inexplicable horror of certain sights (rats, fragments of ancient carving, a sign marked 'Tlotoatin'). It is not a comforting perspective on South America, or existence, which is why Masfield is careful (in the novel) to put it in the context of Sard's finally successful journey.

⁴¹The Ford Madox Ford Reader, p.92.

It is, in fact, a nightmarish view (it is no accident that the 'logic of dreams' governs Sard's progress not only in a metaphorical sense, but in a structural one - the whole quest is heralded by a prophetic dream, and visions and prophecies guide him throughout), and it seems not too strained a conjecture to suggest that it had its origins in his initial associations with the area: as a boy of sixteen, ill with sunstroke and a nervous breakdown, at what seemed an absolute impasse in his life.

To an unusual extent, then, Masefield the writer is bound up with the fate of his characters. Sard is obviously, to some extent, an ideal self dealing with the rigours that Masefield himself was unable to face. The horrors are therefore exaggerated to giant size (the swamp, the bears, 'Tlotoatin') - but the prize of success ('your Excellency will have to ask my wife'⁴²) is correspondingly lessened. None of Masefield's heroines are particularly convincingly imagined, and the double natured 'Margarita/Juanita' - though undoubtedly interesting as a symbol and a narrative device - is no exception. Her twin facets - English and Spanish, pursuer and pursued (she, too, has been looking for Sard, whom she knows as 'Chisholm', his Christian name, rather than 'Harker') - provide a justification for the book's incredibly round-about structure, but do not succeed in making us apprehend its conventionally 'romantic' ending as anything but an anticlimax.

Masefield appears to have taken the failure to heart - since this particular deficiency is rectified in his next novel, *Odtaa* (an anagram for 'One Damned Thing After Another'), where the heroine, Carlotta, is already betrothed to the god-like Manuel before the book's hero, Highworth Ridden, arrives on the scene. The horrors and confusions of a South American journey are therefore untainted with the insipidity of a 'love interest' in any but the most hagiographic sense (Carlotta is adored by the entire nation as a virtual goddess). The quest, what is more, is this time conducted in vain. Carlotta is murdered by the Dictator Lopez, and 'Hi' is left with the scant solace that while 'Life's battle is a conquest for the

⁴²Masefield, *Sard*, p.332.

strong;/ The meaning shows in the defeated thing⁴³.

Our account of Masfield's earliest associations with South America should therefore ideally be supplemented with some hypothesis relevant to his life-long inability to portray convincingly a 'love' relationship between a man and a woman; but that is a little outside the scope of this study⁴⁴. As far as the tenor of *Sard Harker* itself is concerned, I think it is sufficient to note that inability, and (more importantly) to record the extreme 'obsession-compulsion' with the elements of his narrative which led him to repeat its essential features (albeit marginally 'improved'), in another novel within two years.

⁴³John Masfield, 'The Wanderer', in Collected Poems, third edition (London, 1941), pp.365-72 (p.372).

⁴⁴See, in this connection, pp.89-131 of my unpublished M.A. thesis, 'The Early Novels of John Masfield, 1908-1911' (University of Auckland, 1985).

7.3 Vehicle

The map of the savannahs was a dream. The names Brazil and Guyana were colonial conventions I had known from childhood. I clung to them now as to a curious necessary stone and footing, even in my dream, the ground I knew I must not relinquish. They were an actual stage, a presence, however mythical they seemed to the universal and the spiritual eye. They were as close to me as my ribs, the rivers and the flatland, the mountains and heartland I intimately saw. I could not help cherishing my symbolic map, and my bodily prejudice like a well-known room and house of superstition within which I dwelt. I saw this kingdom of man turned into a colony and battleground of spirit, a priceless tempting jewel I dreamed I possessed.⁴⁵

In order to study the agency or 'Vehicle' of Masefield's narrative, it will be necessary to examine some other works belonging to what might be termed the South American 'Quest' genre. The three that I have chosen are *Dead Man Leading*, by V. S. Pritchett (1937), *Los pasos perdidos*, by Alejo Carpentier (1953), and *Palace of the Peacock*, by Wilson Harris (1960). They therefore represent, respectively, European, Latin American, and West Indian contributions to this narrative sub-branch. I quote from them in reverse chronological order.

Al cabo de algún tiempo de navegación en aquel caño secreto, se producía un fenómeno parecido al que conocen los montañeses extraviados en las nieves: se perdía la noción de la verticalidad, dentro de una suerte de desorientación, de mareo de los ojos. No se sabía ya lo que era del árbol y lo que era del reflejo. No se sabía ya si la claridad venía de abajo o de arriba, si el techo era de agua, o el agua suelo; si las troneras abiertas en la hojarasca no eran pozos luminosos conseguidos en lo anegado ... Empezaba a

⁴⁵Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet* (London, 1985), p.24.

tener miedo. Nada me amenazaba.⁴⁶

And finally:

this land enclosed him in himself. He was not travelling as he had travelled in Greenland; he was travelling here in himself, paddling down the streams of his own life and nature, enclosed in the jungle of his own unknown or half-known thoughts and impulses. But present with him all the day, written on the walls of the trees in all their variegated detail, was his own life ramified, overgrown, dense and intricate and mysterious in its full tones, half tones and shades of consciousness. The forest itself was like the confusing, shapeless product of a torpid and bemused introspection.⁴⁷

All of these novels have features in common. They all concern journeys into the South American jungle (*Palace of the Peacock* is set in Guyana, *Los pasos perdidos* on the head-waters of the Orinoco, while Pritchett in *Dead Man Leading* specifies only the 'interior of Brazil'); they all make great play with voyaging by river (conforming in this, as in other respects, to their prototype, Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'); and, while the principal expeditionaries are men, they all in some way see their journeys as related to women with whom they are, or have been involved. What is more, taking passages at random, one can find a good deal of imagery which is common to two or more of the books (not just the references to 'Greenland' and 'mountain-climbing' in the quotations above - there is also Pritchett's reference to how 'the chaotic coast opened with the brilliant order of a peacock's tail, its momentous and gorged profusion'⁴⁸, which matches Wilson Harris's 'palace' where 'The stars became peacocks' eyes, and the great

⁴⁶ Alejo Carpentier, *Los pasos perdidos*, edited by Roberto González Echevarría, Letras Hispánicas (Madrid, 1985), pp.223-24: 'After sailing for a time through that secret channel, one began to feel the same thing that mountain-climbers feel, lost in the snow: the loss of the sense of verticality, a kind of disorientation, and a dizziness of the eyes. It was no longer possible to say which was tree and which reflection of tree. Was the light coming from above or below? Was the sky or the earth water? Were the openings in the foliage pools of light in the water? ... I was beginning to be afraid. Nothing menaced me.' (translations quoted from Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*, translated by Harriet de Onis (Harmondsworth, 1980) - page numbers thus (145)).

⁴⁷ V. S. Pritchett, *Dead Man Leading* (Oxford, 1984), pp.115-16.

⁴⁸ Pritchett, p.51.

tree of flesh and blood swirled into another stream that sparkled with divine feathers⁴⁹; not to mention the use of Biblical language, especially portentous references to the days of creation, common to Harris and Carpentier: 'It was the seventh day from Mariella. And the creation of the windows of the universe was finished'⁵⁰ (Wilson Harris); 'se daba por terminada la Convivencia del Séptimo día'⁵¹ (Alejo Carpentier)).

I do not think too great a stress should be placed on these coincidences of nomenclature, but there are respects in which these books' common features are less arbitrary. Let us examine more closely the three quotations above. They all appear to me to postulate, in some sense, the jungle landscape as an image of the self. In Harris, the identification is complete: 'They [the names] were as close to me as my ribs ... my symbolic landscape ... my bodily prejudice', despite being mere 'colonial conventions'. This is roughly in accord with the nature of Harris's narrative, which details the spiritual journey of a crew of drowned men to the headwaters of a river in Guyana ('derived', says the author, 'from an Amerindian root word which means "land of waters"'⁵²).

In Carpentier, on the other hand, the 'relativism' - the sense of confusion between self and landscape - is only partial. The narrator has become confused by the sameness of the sights that surround him, which leads him to doubt the evidence of his senses, but he is still in no real doubt that there is an answer to the question: 'si el techo era de agua, o el agua suela'? (Elsewhere he believes that 'vivo el silencio; un silencio venido de tan lejos, espeso de tantos silencios, que en él cobraría la palabra un fragor de creación. Si yo dijera algo, si yo hablara a solas, como a menudo hago, me asustaría a mí mismo'⁵³ - even here,

⁴⁹Harris, p.112.

⁵⁰Harris, p.111.

⁵¹Carpentier, p.70: 'the Living-Together of the Seventh Day had come to its end.' (8).

⁵²Harris, p.7.

⁵³Carpentier, p.173: 'I was living silence: a silence that came from so far off, compounded of so many silences, that a word dropped into it would have taken on the clangour of creation. Had I said anything, had I talked to myself, as I often do, I should have frightened myself.' (99).

though, he preserves a distinction between the self that is 'silence' and that which is capable of speech).

Finally, in the passage from Pritchett, the hallucinatory state of the principal protagonist, Harry Johnson, is shown by his close identification of himself with this 'jungle of his own unknown or half-known thoughts and impulses'. Probably this usage is the closest to Masfield's Sard and the 'wasted' land which is traversed by his wounded self.

To sum up, then, the three books which we have chosen to examine all belong to different literary traditions, and have a different sense of what is 'allowable' or comprehensible in the field of the novel. Pritchett's, the earliest of them, is basically a naturalist text, which 'attempted' (as the author explains) 'a psychology of exploration'⁵⁴. He therefore allows himself to express the characters' feelings about the land they are traversing, without committing himself to any endorsement (or contradiction) of their views. Carpentier, similarly, equips his novel with a realistic framework and a single narrative point-of-view - thus confining his challenge to convention (he is regarded as one of the founders of magic realism) to what Brian McHale would regard as the 'epistemological' axis. Only Wilson Harris could be said to be a fully-fledged post-modernist - with the corresponding lack of a solid basis in reality (it is unclear if any of his characters could be said to be alive at any point in the narrative, but one hesitates to commit oneself to the conclusion that it is - like Charles Williams' *All Hallows' Eve* (1944) - an entirely 'posthumous' book, since various of them succeed in dying again during the course of the journey); and his 'ontological' questioning of the nature of the world (or worlds) we inhabit.

Given the disparity of these traditions, however, the books that have resulted from them have a remarkable amount in common. We have already mentioned the fact that all of them identify the self with the landscape that is being traversed - but there are at least two other *topoi* which they share.

The first is that of the 'landscape as woman':

⁵⁴Quoted in Paul Theroux, 'Introduction', in Pritchett, ix-xiii (p.ix).

Por su boca las plantas se ponían a hablar y pregonaban sus propios poderes. El bosque tenía un dueño, que era un genio que brincaba sobre un solo pie, y nada de lo que creciera a la sombra de los árboles debía tomarse sin pago ... No sabía decir por qué esa mujer me pareció muy bella, de pronto, cuando arrojó a la chimenea un puñado de gramas acremente olorosas, y sus rasgos fueron acusados en poderoso relieve por las sombras.⁵⁵

The unnamed narrator of Carpentier's novel is unable to say why Rosario, the earthy woman of the forest, through whom the plants 'se ponían a hablar y pregonaban sus propios poderes', should suddenly seem so attractive to him - but in the context of the novel, nothing could be clearer. As he explains it later to Ruth, his American wife, he initially took a mistress ('Mouche') because in her 'al menos, había encontrado algo del juvenil desorden, del impudor alegre, un tanto animal, que era inseparable, para mí, del amor físico'⁵⁶. Rosario, on the other hand, he depicts as 'un arcano hecho persona, cuyos prestigios me habían marcado, luego de pruebas que debían callarse, como se callaban los secretos de una orden de caballería'⁵⁷. Even to him this seems a little 'Wagnerian', but Ruth has her revenge by referring to his forest lover coldly as '*Tu Atala*'⁵⁸.

Leaving aside the rather nauseating conceit of Carpentier's central character, we may note here the careful schematization of his three lovers. Ruth, the American, is an actress living in New York, the slave of a long-running Broadway hit, who accords him her favours regularly every seven days. Their life together, in other words, is all façade. Mouche, his French mistress, an astrologer by trade, is only exposed as inadequate by the realities of the forest journey - her

⁵⁵Carpentier, pp.149-50: 'Through her lips the plants began to speak and describe their own powers. The forest had a ruler, a one-legged tutelary genius, and nothing that grew in the shade of the trees should be taken without payment ... I could not have said why this woman suddenly seemed to me so beautiful as she threw a handful of pungent herbs into the flames, which brought out her features in strong relief against the shadows.' (76-77).

⁵⁶Carpentier, p.304: 'at least I had found a kind of youthful abandon, a gay shamelessness, with that touch of the animal which for me was indispensable to physical love.' (222).

⁵⁷Carpentier, p.305: 'an arcanum made flesh who had set her seal on me after trials whose secret must never be revealed, like those of the knightly orders.' (223).

⁵⁸Carpentier, p.305: 'Your Atala.' (224). Author's italics.

bohemianism, though all very well in New York, is a hollow sham by the standards of 'the interior'. This is symbolized by the insensitive way in which she makes homosexual advances to Rosario. Rosario herself, as we have seen, is the 'voice of the plants' - and the hero's final decision to leave her (in the belief that it will only be temporary, until he can provide himself with some of the trappings of civilization - such as books and paper), is the fatal error that exiles him from this vegetable paradise.

In *Dead Man Leading* the three main characters, on an expedition into the Brazilian jungle, are all in some way 'led' by their relationship to the same woman, Lucy Mommbrekke (there is something pleasing in the reflection that while the Latin hero of Carpentier's novel enthralls three women one after another, in this British novel none of the men are sure of Lucy's continued affection - a gauge of the respective optimism of the two cultures?). Gilbert Phillips, the journalist, is her ex-lover; Charles Wright is her step-father, though he seems to have married her mother only to get closer to her; and Harry Johnson, her present lover, is driven to madness and hallucination by the thought that he may have made her pregnant, and thereby 'sullied' his own purity. Charles Wright speaks for them all:

He too had his private unknown land. He had seen its face and its dress. He longed to be in its body. The talk of the missionary's country and the mystery of his disappearance was talk of a rival and an attempt to enhance her attraction⁵⁹.

The 'missionary' in question is Harry Johnson's father, lost seventeen years before, the 'dead man' who leads them on. Charles too dies in pursuit of his 'unknown land', unaware perhaps of the suspect nature of his desire to be 'in its body'. In any case (unlike Conrad's Kurtz) the last word he utters is 'Lucy ...'⁶⁰

In *Palace of the Peacock*, Mariella, the mistress of the narrator's brother Donne, is (it appears) the one who ambushes and shoots him at the beginning of

⁵⁹Pritchett, p.62.

⁶⁰Pritchett, p.130.

the book. The trip up the falls, to the mission where she has taken refuge, is the beginning of his characters' quest into the unknown (defined as a certain number of days 'from Mariella'⁶¹). Wilson Harris's use of this motif is, however, a little more playful than that of his predecessors. Of one of his characters, Cameron, he says:

There was always the inevitable Woman (he had learned to capitalize his affairs)⁶².

- A pun which leads us in more than one direction.

The second *topos* shared by the three books might be summed up as 'language as the only definition of a world.' The sense in which this is meant is, however, slightly more contingent on the nature of the various narratives. For example, in Carpentier's case, I have already quoted his character's remarks about being 'living silence' - a comment which he supplements by claiming that 'Un día, los hombres descubrirán un alfabeto en los ojos de los calcedonias, en los pardos terciopelos de la falena, y entonces se sabrá con asombro que cada caracol manchado era, desde siempre, un poema'⁶³. In other words, landscape is a language in the sense that it will, some day, be able to be read - along with the true nature of men and animals. A fairly visionary prospect, but one which leaves the essential division between language and reality unchallenged.

Wilson Harris, predictably, takes it a stage further when he describes (accurately, when one thinks about it) one of the daSilva twins as resembling old newsprint:

His bones were splinters and points ... and his flesh was newspaper, drab, wet until the lines and markings had run fantastically together. His hair stood flat on his brow like ink ... He shook his head again but not a word blew from his lips. DaSilva stared at the apparition his brother presented as a man would stare at a reporter who had returned from the grave with no

⁶¹Harris, p.111.

⁶²Harris, p.40.

⁶³Carpentier, p.270: 'A day will come when men will discover an alphabet in the eyes of chalcedonies, in the markings of the moth, and will learn in astonishment that every spotted snail has always been a poem.' (190).

news whatsoever of a living return.⁶⁴

Once again, the pun conceals a subtlety of intention. 'Reporter' is supposed to mean simply 'someone who has returned', but it also means 'one who fills the columns of newspapers'. It is hard to imagine a more telling image of the disintegration of a fictional character than this description of the processes of decay eroding the ink and paper of which he is 'composed'. The textuality of Harris's entire world - as in the first quotation from him above - is therefore in no more doubt than the 'dream' which is his 'symbolic map' of the savannahs.

Pritchett too employs this motif in a very suggestive way. Harry Johnson and Gilbert Phillips are still pursuing the chimera of the lost missionary:

Less and less they spoke and the words became shorter; their completest trust was in silence ... Normal speech, would have been alien and rich in betrayal. To suggest their normal world would have insinuated doubts, angers and irritations, would have made them separate. When they were together hacking their way, they merely swore.⁶⁵

Language is for them, then, a possible means of division. The only way in which they can avoid recognizing the deadly peril which they are in is by avoiding 'normal speech', with its residue of logical structures and syntactical demands.

If we now go back to our analysis of Masfield's treatment of landscape, we find, similarly, 'hints at an overall perception of landscape as language', shown in the immediate way in which Sard's interpretations are echoed by the obstacles (the cañon, the swamp) which he encounters. Nor is there any doubt that Sard's exterior landscapes operate as an image of the self. In fact, the only aspect of our 'Pritchett - Carpentier - Harris' paradigm only partially explored with regard to *Sard Harker* is the idea of landscape as woman; but the dual nature of Juanita/Margarita, and the ways in which she is associated with every aspect of Sard's quest - also the fact that it is almost invariably the women who advance and the men who hinder his progress - suggest that that element is present too.

⁶⁴Harris, pp.95-96.

⁶⁵Pritchett, p.170.

What I am building up to, in fact, is an answer to the accusations of purely 'surface' excitement levelled against Masefield's novels by Stephen Medcalf; also, an alternative line of descent to oppose to Anthony Burgess's suggestion of 'rattling good yarns' like *The Four Feathers* (1902), *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), and *Redgauntlet* (1824) (Medcalf's implied juxtaposition with William Golding - especially works like *Pincher Martin* (1956) or *Rites of Passage* (1980) - is a little closer to the mark, but still not very informative). In short, every essential feature which we have isolated from Carpentier, Pritchett and Wilson Harris is also to be found in Masefield's South American 'trilogy' (one should not forget that the obsessive, the not purely 'surface' nature of these themes is signalled by his willingness to repeat them and vary them). More to the point, despite their very different provenances, and despite the fact that I have deliberately tried to analyze them in their own terms without stressing too much their similarities with *Sard Harker*, any one of our three authors might be measured according to the same criteria.

'Landscape' we have already dealt with in some detail, but for 'Mimicry', take the following passages from Wilson Harris:

'We been playing a year ago,' Carroll said musingly. 'Suddenly we lose we way in the trees. We think we never find home. We started hugging, a frighten sweet-sweet feeling like if I truly come home. I wasn't a stranger no more. She cry a little and she laugh like if she was home at last. And she kiss me after it all happen. ...

'... Look man, look outside again. Primitive. Every boundary line is a myth. No-man's land, understand?'⁶⁶

This differentiation of styles of conversation may be more schematically regional than Masefield's, but it has a comparable vigour and authority.

'Peculiarities of Character' are, predictably, to be found in abundance in all of these narratives - but the character of Calcott in *Dead Man Leading* might perhaps be seen as paradigmatic. With his endless insinuating conversation, his table-turning with the Portuguese Silva (which has resulted in a 'thick bundle of

⁶⁶Harris, pp.72 & 22.

MS.⁶⁷ full of the 'eloquence' of their spirit-guide Hamlet), and his simultaneous contempt and admiration for the educated classes, he is a character in the old-fashioned sense of the word. He is also, of course, a stereotype out of Maugham and Kipling - the 'hard-drinking white man' who has 'gone native'; but here, once again, the stereotype can prove strangely fruitful. As Carpentier, himself at pains in his afterword to justify the accuracy of his characterization ('En cuanto a Yannes, el minero griego que viajaba con el tomo de *La Odisea* por todo haber, baste decir que el autor no ha modificada su nombre, siquiera⁶⁸'), is careful to point out, such characters:

son los personajes que encuentra todo viajero en el gran teatro de la selva. Responden todos a una realidad - como responde a una realidad, también un cierto mito del Dorado, que alientan todavía los yacimientos de oro y de piedras preciosas.⁶⁹

We thus see a neat connection made between the 'mito' of El Dorado and the exigencies of characterization in a South American quest narrative. Truly, to return to the words of Darwin quoted above, 'The theatre is worthy of the scenes acted on it'⁷⁰.

Finally, the existence of 'Small Town Paranoia' is hardly in doubt in any of these rather disconcerting novels. In *Dead Man Leading* both Gilbert and Harry withdraw into worlds of their own, with increasingly little connection with the perils of their situation - their only remaining emotion being mutual suspicion. In *Los pasos perdidos* the narrator, originally hailed on his return from the jungle as a hero, is vilified when the public learns of his relationship with Mouche. The purest expression of this pervading sense of malign and irrational threat (almost omnipresent in Wilson Harris's metaphysical world) is, however, in the final sentence of our first quotation from Carpentier above:

⁶⁷Pritchett, p.78.

⁶⁸Carpentier, p.332: 'As for Yannes, the Greek miner who travelled with the *Odyssey* as his sole possession, I should like to say that I have not even changed his name.' (252).

⁶⁹Carpentier, p.332: 'are personages every traveller encounters in the great theatre of the jungle. They all represent a reality, as does the myth of El Dorado, which is nourished by the deposits of gold and precious stones.' (252).

⁷⁰See Chapter Three, p.99.

Empezaba a tener miedo. Nada me amenazaba.⁷¹

For sheer conciseness of expression, the only rival to that is Masfield's splendidly enigmatic conclusion to *Odtaa* (referring to the martyred Carlotta, subject of so many poems and eulogies in the text):

And Carlotta?

Ah, Carlotta.⁷²

⁷¹Carpentier, p.224: 'I was beginning to be afraid. Nothing menaced me.' (145).

⁷²Masfield, *Odtaa*, p.326.

PART 4
Translation

Chapter 8

Bishop and 'Helena Morley'

8.1 Translation

8.1.1 The Nature of the Artefact

Diamantina, Brazil, March 14th 1893:

The mysterious burglar is the talk of the town; at grandma's *chácara* they don't speak about anything else. They say that he disappeared but now he's come back again and that he's robbed lots of houses and stores and nobody has been able to catch him. When they try to take hold of him he can turn into anything he wants to. Today Emídio and José Pedro arrived at the *chácara* terrified, talking about the thief's exploits. He broke into a store in Rio Grande Street and stole a lot. The owner arrived while he was filling his bag and whistled. The people of Rio Grande Street, who had already been warned, rushed into the street to help catch the thief. He ran away with the people after him. When he got near the church of the Glória, and they'd almost caught him, he turned into an ant-hill. Emídio and José Pedro told us about it, scared to death.

I'm doubtful about this story, because if they saw the man turn into an ant-hill they could have taken the ant-hill and locked it up in jail and it would have to turn back into a man again. I don't believe this story about a man turning into an ant-hill or a tree-trunk or anything else. But just the same he frightens us terribly. Every day there are reports that he has broken into a house or a store. We'll all sleep easier when this mysterious thief is caught.¹

In the progress of our argument so far, we have defined the methodology of such an 'influence study' in terms of chronology and genre. We then went on to examine some fictions of South America by highlighting their respective views of the function of the continent in diverse contexts. It now remains to look at the genesis of the contemporary relationship between the 'South America' which exists in Latin American and Western literatures. In order to do this, I have

¹The *Diary of 'Helena Morley'*, translated by Elizabeth Bishop (London, 1981), pp.17-18. The word *chácara* is glossed as 'a house with extensive gardens, or even a small farm, but not necessarily in the country' (p.xxxiii).

chosen to concentrate on the concept of 'translation' between the two cultures as exemplified by the American poet Elizabeth Bishop - both her own relationship with Brazil, and an actual translation completed by her there.

The passage above, from Bishop's translation of *The Diary of 'Helena Morley'* (1957), accordingly presents us with a number of difficulties of interpretation. In the first place, who is speaking - and to what audience? The simple answer, that the speaker is Helena Morley, filtered through the English translation of Elizabeth Bishop, is complicated by the fact that 'Helena Morley' is the pseudonym of Dona Alice Brant, and the 'Diary' in question is a series of short essays written because:

When I was a child my father encouraged me to form the habit of writing down everything that happened to me. Almost every day at school the Portuguese teacher expected us to write a composition, which could be a description, a letter, or an account of what we had been doing. I found it was easiest to write about myself and my very numerous family.²

Bishop, in her introduction to the book, specifies further that it was Dona Alice's husband, Dr. Augusto Mario Caldeira Brant, 'who had undertaken to put together all the old scraps and notebooks and prepare them for publication'.³

We are thus already at a number of removes from a truly 'authorial' utterance. First, in an even more direct way than most diaries (generally allowed to be semi-public documents - for the eyes of at least one other person), this series of 'notebooks and loose sheets'⁴ was composed to satisfy the exigencies of Dona Alice's school-teachers - at least partly as a technical exercise, to obtain credit in their eyes and those of her father. As Bishop puts it: 'Occasionally she has "runs" on one subject; perhaps "papa" had admired a particular page and so she wrote a sequel to it or remembered a similar story'.⁵

More to the point, however, we must consider the influence of her husband,

²Helena Morley, p.xxxv.

³Helena Morley, p.x.

⁴Helena Morley, p.xxxv.

⁵Helena Morley, p.xxvi.

Dr. Brant, on the finished product. For a start (and apparently trivially) there is his insertion of the pseudonym 'Helena' into the text in place of the author's actual name⁶. More significant is his omission of himself from the record. Bishop tells us:

The diaries, I found, had been cut short where they now end by Dr. Brant because the next year marks his own appearance in them, and his acceptance as a suitor. I feel it is a pity he so firmly omits every incident of their courtship. By the time she was seventeen, 'Helena' had already received five proposals of marriage from 'foreign' miners living in Diamantina ... She had indeed become what she admits to yearning to be in her diary: 'the leading girl of Diamantina.'⁷

His very 'absence' can thus be seen to be a 'presence'. It is his decision that his wife should be presented as a pre-pubescent girl, innocent and artless, before the onset of adolescent emotional turmoil - and the fact that this also entails leaving out any such picture of himself (a not inconsiderable threat, considering the merciless way in which 'Helena' pillories other men of her acquaintance⁸), might also have influenced his decision.

I do not mean this to sound like a condemnation of the 'unreliable witness' of Dr. Brant. Rather, I wish to emphasize that the presence of any editor who is not also the author of a text (in which case any alterations might be regarded as forming part of the same nexus of intention), must inevitably influence our reading of it. Above all, though, I wish to point out the simultaneous 'presence' both as translator and commentator of Elizabeth Bishop. It is, after all, she who describes Dr. Brant's part in the preparation of the manuscripts for publication (which goes unmentioned in the Portuguese original); and it is she who supplies us with details of Dona Alice's subsequent courtship and marriage. In short, she

⁶Though Bishop informs us that "'Helena" and "Morley" are both names from her English father's family'. (*Helena Morley*, p.ix).

⁷*Helena Morley*, p.xii.

⁸*Helena Morley*, pp.85-86: 'Knowing that I and my sister have that failing of laughing at everything, how did papa have the courage to send a guest to our house the way he did? ... We are idiots about laughing. We began that night and even now we can't look at our guest without a fit of giggling. We just have to see the man and then we ... simply burst'. Perhaps a few such attacks embarrassed Dr. Brant himself.

provides the context for a new interpretation of the book. Not only does she identify the pseudonym 'Helena Morley' as a pseudonym, but she also gives us a portrait of the person whom it conceals. What is more, through the agency of Sir Richard Burton's *Explorations of the Highlands of the Brazil* (1869), which contains an account of a visit to Diamantina and a meeting with Dona Alice's grandfather⁹, she recounts details of the diamond mines which bear on, but are extraneous to the text itself. Her own visit to the town in the early 1950s is used for more 'local colour', and emphasizes the extent to which her interest in the diary is coloured by the fact that *'it really happened; everything did take place, day by day, minute by minute, once and only once, just the way Helena says it did'*¹⁰. That, for her, is 'the charm and the main point'.

It is therefore, I think, by no means an eccentric claim to say that *Minha Vida de Menina* (1942), is a different book from the translated *Diary of 'Helena Morley'*, which Bishop originally intended to call *Black Beans and Diamonds*¹¹. The Portuguese book is presented simply as the childhood diary of Helena Morley, with a preface by its author, and (on the dust-jacket¹²), a recommendation by George Bernanos praising the fact that it owes 'nothing to either experience or talent, but everything to *ingenium*, to genius'¹³. The English version, on the other hand, exposes the mask of 'Helena Morley' even on its title-page, and - through Bishop's introduction - explains the choices and omissions in the preparation of the diary as a published book; also supplying details of Helena's¹⁴ immediate landscape not included in her account. To an extent, this merely reflects the different perceived needs of Portuguese and English-speaking readers, but the consequence of these diverse modes of

⁹Helena Morley, p.xiii.

¹⁰Helena Morley, p.xxiv. (Paraphrasing a quotation from Gerard Manley Hopkins made further up the page).

¹¹Robert Giroux, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Bishop, *The Collected Prose*, edited by Robert Giroux (London, 1984), vii-xxii (p.viii).

¹²Information from *Helena Morley*, p.viii.

¹³Helena Morley, p.xxxvii.

¹⁴Following Bishop's practice, I refer thus to the author of the Diary, reserving the name 'Dona Alice' for the actual Senhora Brant.

presentation is to highlight further the gap between Latin American and Western views of what is allegedly the same text.

For the moment, however, let us return to the long passage quoted above. Bishop says of Helena's method of composition that it:

seems influenced by the La Fontaine she hates to study; she winds up her stories with a neat moral that doesn't apply too exactly; sometimes, for variety's sake, she starts off with the moral instead. She has a sense of the right quotation, or detail, the gag-line, and where to stop. The characters are skilfully differentiated: the quiet, humorous father, the devout, doting, slightly foolish mother, the rigid Uncle Conrado.¹⁵

The appeal of this book for Bishop, then, is two-fold: on the one hand it is the fact that the incidents in it '*really happened*'; on the other, it is the narrative skill displayed by its author in shaping these incidents into anecdotes. The fact that Bishop retells one or two of her favourite stories in the introduction, emphasizing a sub-text which seems to her to be implicit in the writing and yet not entirely present to its author ('I like to think of the two tall, thin little girls hanging onto their mother's arms, the three figures stumbling up the steep streets of the rocky, lightless little town beneath the cold bright moon and stars; and I can hear the surprised young soldier's voice, mama's polite reply, and then three pairs of footsteps scuttling home again over the cobblestones'¹⁶), signals a third source of appeal - a synthesis, perhaps, of the other two. It is the simultaneous naivety and knowingness of Helena's writing - the fact that her conjectures (such as the one about not believing that a man can turn into an anthill), are often very sensible, and yet funny because they dramatize her ignorance of many of the salient features of life - which make her book, for Bishop, 'fresh, sad, funny, and eternally true'¹⁷. Thus it is possible to admire the dexterity with which the text is composed, while at the same time silently 'correcting' it against a grown-up awareness of certain motivations of which Helena is unaware. It is here that it s

¹⁵ Helena Morley, p.xxvi.

¹⁶ Helena Morley, p.xxviii.

¹⁷ Helena Morley, p.viii.

having 'really happened' becomes significant.

In Bishop's search for works which might be seen as in some way parallel, she mentions that

Certain pages reminded me of more famous and 'literary' ones: Nausicaa doing her laundry on the beach, possibly with the help of *her* freed slaves; bits from Chaucer, Wordsworth's poetical children and country people, or Dorothy Wordsworth's wandering beggars.¹⁸

These are resemblances of incident, however, rather than of tone. They are too studied, too forced to approach the flavour of the Diary (hence her use of inverted commas around the word 'literary' - not even Dorothy Wordsworth can be absolved from the accusation of writing self-consciously, to achieve a certain effect). Bishop goes on:

Occasionally entries referring to slavery seemed like notes for an unwritten, Brazilian, feminine version of Tom Sawyer and Nigger Jim. But this was a real, day-by-day diary, kept by a real girl, and anything resembling it that I could think of had been observed or made up, and written down, by adults.¹⁹

The only partial exception she will allow is Anne Frank's diary, 'but its forced maturity and closed atmosphere are tragically different from the authentic child-likeness, the classical sunlight and simplicity of this one'.

To sum up, then, Bishop makes it plain that she considers the virtues of the Diary to be partially 'literary' (Dona Alice's own skill at composition, at shaping an anecdote - 'the right quotation, or detail, the gag-line, and where to stop'), and partially fortuitous (the fact that it *really happened*, that Helena's descriptions illuminate not just her own adolescent mind, but also the life of the small town in which she lives). Anne Frank, too, fulfils these two criteria - but her environment inspires the wrong sort of response, a 'forced maturity'. If we take Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789) as the exemplar of the Romantic cult of childhood to which Bishop is tentatively referring in this passage ('authentic child-likeness ... classical

¹⁸ Helena Morley, p.viii.

¹⁹ Helena Morley, p.viii.

sunlight'), then we can see that the Diary's factual nature is, indeed, a god-send to mythologizers. Here, finally, is confirmation of the verisimilitude of at least *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), if not of William and Dorothy Wordsworth.

Although Helena enjoys writing (as she mentions on several occasions) it is to please her father and teachers that she produces these 'compositions'. Nor is there any element of invention in what is contained within - the only 'artifice' being the way in which incidents are grouped around a central theme. Best of all, though, her account largely confirms 'adult' images of idyllic childhood (an interpretation fostered by the author herself fifty years later: 'you do not need to pity poor little girls just because they are poor. We were so happy! Happiness does not consist in wordly goods but in a peaceful home, in family affections, in a simple life without ambition'²⁰). The young Helena would never have been guilty of such sententious reflexions - and neither would Mark Twain or the Wordsworths in their respective accounts of childhood, but one can see, nevertheless, that it is their, adult world that Dona Alice Brant has come to inhabit. In a sense, then, Helena Morley is as alien to her as to them.

This reading of Bishop's is certainly a cogent one, and one that influences her entire presentation of the text - but it is not necessarily exhaustive. Her introduction seems, despite its listing details of local custom and belief, to blur deliberately the question of how much of the appeal of the Diary is, in fact, 'universal' - and therefore implicitly the same for Brazilian and English-speaking readers - and how much is culturally specific in a more complex way. In the long passage quoted above, we can see the problem focussed with some clarity.

Take the names of the two main characters, for example - Emídio and José Pedro. The action takes place in 'Rio Grande' Street. These names seem quintessentially 'Latin American' to an English or American reader, and draw behind them, willy-nilly, a whole complex of associations. It is hard to see how they could seem anything but neutral and commonplace to a Brazilian. Then there are certain customs dimly intimated by the narrative - the habit of

²⁰Helena Morley, p.xxxvi.

'whistling' to summon help, or, for that matter, of sitting around at the *chácara* (a word which Bishop chooses to gloss, rather than seeking an English alternative), all morning, waiting for people to come by with news - which seem perhaps disproportionately intriguing to the foreign reader. Finally, both the physical and social landscape of the story have different associations for indigenous and outside audiences. The fact that the 'mysterious thief' turns into an ant-hill (or, at other times, a tree-trunk) is significant in both these respects. Ant-hills (which we might tend to associate with Africa and the veldt), must be a common sight around Diamantina if one of them can provide effective camouflage. What is more, they must be visible even in what appears to be the centre of the town ('near the church of the Glória'). From just any small town, then, Diamantina turns into an exotic desert capital, with withered trees and ant-hills vying with humans for a place on the streets.

More significantly, though, Helena's frankly voiced scepticism about the possibility of a man 'turning into an ant-hill or a tree-trunk or anything else' implies that this goes against the grain of public opinion. No-one else at the *chácara* seems to feel any doubt that the story is at least plausible, even if exaggerated in this instance. Even Helena seems to feel that it would be possible to take an ant-hill and lock it up in jail (by digging it up with a spade?), upon which 'it would have to turn back into a man again' - referring unconsciously to a set of folk-beliefs about metamorphoses which she may not realize she possesses. Nor does she cast any doubt on the existence of the thief. His exploits may be fictional, but 'We'll all sleep easier when this mysterious thief is caught' - a *non-sequitur*, given the terms of her argument, but also a practical acknowledgement of the fact that they are all theorizing from insufficient data.

One could go on to refer to the institution of the 'store' in this small town, by reference to some of the other entries (as Bishop puts it, 'one sometimes gets the impression that the greater part of the town, black and white, "rich" and poor, when it hasn't found a diamond lately, gets along by making sweets and pastries, brooms and cigarettes and selling them to each other'²¹), but enough has been

²¹ Helena Morley, p.xxvii.

said to make the point. For a Brazilian audience, the principal virtue of the diary must be its appeal to nostalgia - to a simpler, happier past when metropolitan sophistication had not yet begun to 'corrupt' the culture. The folk-belief of a man turning into an ant-hill seems just as unlikely to such a reader, but not so unfamiliar - similarly with the landscape, the customs, the names. The unfamiliarity of certain aspects of one's own country always has a sense of the proprietary mingled with it - they cannot be as surprising as they would be to a foreign visitor.

For an English-speaking reader, however, everything about the surface of this narrative is exotic and strange - the ingrained superstitions, a town being terrorized by a thief, the names, the institutions. Indeed, paradoxically, one's first reaction tends to be to concentrate only on the familiar aspects of 'universal' experience - a little girl, a small town, a thief, a store. When one reads further, however, and finds that something else is meant by 'store', and that the very streets of this town do not resemble those we know, then a sense of dislocation results. The blow is, of course, cushioned by Bishop's introduction (and strong advocacy of the book's merits) - and finally this simultaneous alienness and familiarity comes to constitute one of the book's chief attractions. One comes to know Helena and, through her, to gain a sense of her surroundings.

It is obvious, though, when the book is looked at in this light, that this is a difference in 'reader-reponses' which goes beyond a mere shift of language and register. One need not invoke the intentional fallacy with *Minha Vida de Menina* - it is a book that accreted, rather than being deliberately composed towards a foreseen end. How one reads it, then, depends to an unusual extent on the social context in which it is being understood, and (in English at any rate), the agenda for such readings has been established by Elizabeth Bishop.

To define further the differences between these two books - the Portuguese original and Bishop's translation - it will, however, be necessary to go deeper into the processes of translation itself. We must be careful to avoid attributing to a particular concatenation of circumstances and of texts what is typical of any transference from one language to another.

8.1.2 Walter Benjamin

In *After Babel* (1975), his seminal work about the implications of translation as a clue to the mechanisms of language, George Steiner comments of a French prose translation of *Paradise Lost*:

In *Paradis perdu* Chateaubriand's idiom is a French under immediate pressure of Latin - as, of course, is so much of ordinary French and of Chateaubriand's own style. But it is also a French which suggests that it has behind it an equivalent to an Authorized Version. As is often pointed out, no such equivalent exists. But its imaginary felt presence is unmistakable when French masters translate those works of English poetry and prose in which the Bible is a shaping precedent.²²

Taken to an extreme, this idea might encourage the Borgesian paradoxes of 'Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*', in which a minor French symbolist decides to rewrite Cervantes' novel word for word, without reference to the text - relying on memory and his knowledge of the period. As the narrator of Borges' story puts it, referring to a comparison between Cervantes and one of the fragments left behind by Menard:

También es vívido el contraste de los estilos. El estilo arcaizante de Menard - extranjero al fin - adolece de alguna afectación. No así el del precursor,²³ que maneja con desenfado el español corriente de su época.

The wording of the two quoted passages is absolutely identical.

Nevertheless, there is a certain truth hidden under the ingenuity of Borges' fable - one which refers directly to the point made by Steiner. A piece of writing does not simply stand by itself, conveying meaning - it bears within it the history of the evolution of the language in which it is written, and (more to the point) of the literary tradition within which it was composed. Thus the speech rhythms and vocabulary of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) betray the influence not just of

²²George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford, 1976), p.318.

²³Borges, II, 132: 'The contrast in style is also vivid. The archaic style of Menard - quite foreign, after all - suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time.' (translations quoted from Borges, *Labyrinths* - page numbers thus (69)).

Hebrew - but of a particular translation from the Hebrew, and this despite the fact that Milton himself was fluent in that language. In order to translate something resembling the effect of Milton's work into French, it is necessary almost to construct a 'ghost' Authorized Version.

In the case mentioned by Borges, too, the fact that the two pieces of the *Quijote* quoted by him are identical in wording does not mean that they are identical in effect or implication. Cervantes, as the narrator remarks, is indulging in 'un mero elogio retórico de la historia'²⁴ - Menard, on the other hand, 'contemporáneo de William James, no define la historia como una indagación de la realidad sino como su origen. La verdad histórica, para él, no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que sucedió'²⁵. A translator, even if he rendered the two passages identically, would have to be conscious of the fact that what is a *tour de force* of pastiche in one case is merely contemporary idiomatic language in the other.

The implications of this matter go further still, however. George Steiner mentions as an extreme example of the 'case for translation':

Walter Benjamin's view of the translator as one who elicits, who conjures up by virtue of unplanned echo a language nearer to the primal unity of speech than is either the original text or the tongue into which he is translating ... This is why, says Benjamin, 'the question of the translatability of certain works would remain open even if they were untranslatable for man'.²⁶

The essay to which Steiner is referring is 'The Task of the Translator', first published in 1923 as the introduction to Benjamin's translation into German of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens* (1861), and it does indeed put forward a more 'messianic' view of the translator's function. If, for the sake of convenience, we take our three quotations as representative of their author's positions (a gross oversimplification, particularly in the case of Steiner), we might see Steiner's view

²⁴Borges, II, 132: 'mere rhetorical praise of history' (69).

²⁵Borges, II, 132: 'a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened.' (69).

²⁶Steiner, p.244.

as being that a successful translation (by a 'master') implies a reconstitution in the host language of the entire literary tradition relevant to that work in its original form. Borges' view goes further still, seeing the same arrangement of words as implying totally different things depending on their literary and cultural context - Chateaubriand is a translator, Pierre Menard a re-creator (a more difficult task, Borges implies, than that of the original author). Benjamin in a certain sense supplies a synthesis of the two - the translator, for him, in the act of translation, inhabits a transcendental realm between languages, thus repairing for a moment the ancient rift of Babel. The creator's vision, too, must originate in this 'more final realm of language'²⁷, but descends subsequently to particularities - the act of translation thus seizes the essence of a work in the process of transferring it to another language in a way that its author, bound up with its potentialities, cannot do. Benjamin goes on to explain the different characteristics of 'originals' and translations:

no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife - which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living - the original undergoes a change. Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process. The obvious tendency of a writer's literary style may in time wither away ... What sounded fresh once may sound hackneyed later; what was once current may someday sound quaint.²⁸

The same process of change applies to translations too, however:

just as the tenor and the significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well. While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to be absorbed by its renewal. Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.²⁹

²⁷Steiner, p.244.

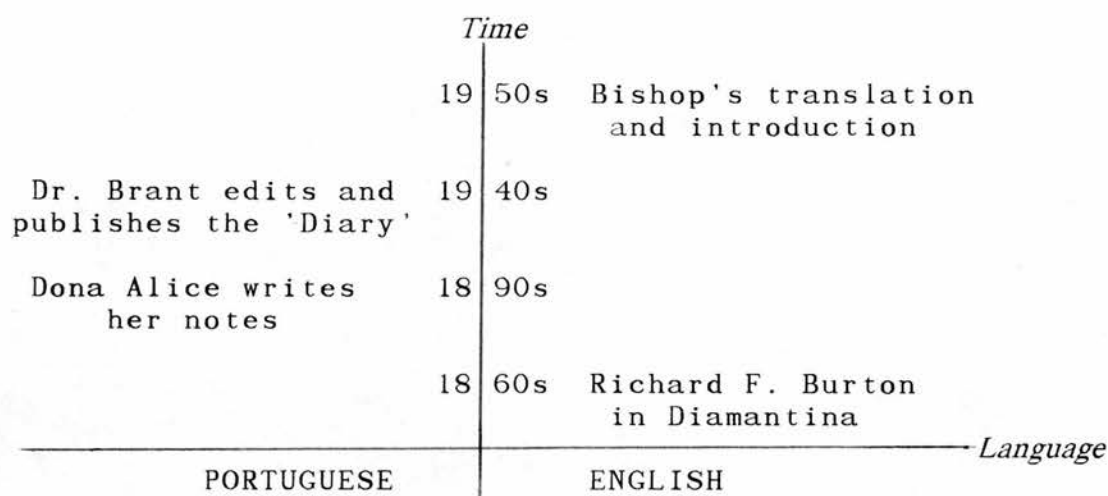
²⁸Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (Glasgow, 1977), p.73.

²⁹Benjamin, p.73.

The discussion can now be seen to bear directly on the point at issue - the difference between the two versions of Helena Morley's Diary. To Benjamin, the difference between an original and a translation is that the former evolves with its language - always taking on new forms and meanings, like a landscape shifted by tectonic pressures. The latter must be superseded by this process because it is forced to undergo two directions of strain - the evolution in meaning of its original, and the changes within its own language. And since translation is, in Benjamin's reading, the ultimate hermeneutic act, it is obviously desirable that it be repeated as often as can be justified by this continuous transformation.

The somewhat arbitrary use of the names of our three theoreticians might be further applied to the case of Helena Morley. Steiner's view of translation necessitates some discussion of the Brazilian literary context of *Minha Vida de Menina* (a more problematic task than it might seem, given the wide disparity between the composition of the material in the book, and its editing and publication). Borges's requires an account of the different readings inspired by what is essentially the same textual artefact in different contexts - a subject which we have touched upon already, but which will require a more extensive account of Elizabeth Bishop and her literary antecedents if it is to be explored in detail. Finally, Benjamin's gives us essentially an overview of the entire process of transposition from one language to another, and it is this which I propose to deal with now.

If one were to imagine a simple line graph, with 'time' as one axis and 'language' as the other, the argument might be presented in diagrammatic form:



As the graph makes clear, the English version in a sense encloses the Portuguese. Helena Morley does indeed refer at one point to an Englishman who 'wrote a book in which he told the story of the party [which her grandfather took him to] and spoke about grandma and grandpa and my aunts and uncles'³⁰, but it is left to Bishop to confirm that this was Sir Richard Burton, and to quote some passages from his account. Thus, in English, the history of the Diary begins in the 1860s, at the time of the visit, and ends (at any rate for Bishop), in the 1950s, when her translation was composed and published (leaving aside minor details such as her postscript to the 1977 edition, reprinted in *Collected Prose*³¹). The emphasis must, however, be laid on the 1950s as the date of the translation's idiom, as that is the moment at which Elizabeth Bishop's English intersects the original Portuguese.

The Portuguese version has a simpler (and therefore more linguistically malleable) provenance. The words - even if a little tidied by the editor - are those of a young girl in the 1890s. The preface added by Dona Alice to the original

³⁰Helena Morley, p.179.

³¹Bishop, *Prose*, pp.108-09.

publication merely serves to emphasize this point. The difference between the two paradigms might be presented in an equation:

$$1890 > 1940 = \textit{Minha Vida de Menina}$$

$$1869(1890 > 1940)1957 = \textit{The Diary of 'Helena Morley'}^{32}.$$

Nor is one forced to rely solely on the word of Walter Benjamin for the 'buckling' effect that a more complex equation has on a linguistic artefact. Elizabeth Bishop's translation, so seamlessly contemporary when it first appeared, must increasingly as time goes by appear as an artefact of the 1950s (like the early Penguin Classics, dedicated to 'plain style' and eschewing false archaisms). The version prepared by Dr. Brant, however, can only increase its importance as a window on the 1890s with our gradual separation from that era. Thus, as Benjamin puts it, we are left with an original which undergoes 'a maturing process', while 'even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to be absorbed by its renewal'. There may never be another English translation of *Minha Vida de Menina*, as the vogue of such books depends on shifts of literary fashion, but those works (like Homer) which are translated anew in every generation provide us with the only sure evidence of how our predecessors read the text. The Greek words look essentially the same now as they did then, but not only an entire philosophy of reading but a series of shifts in the language itself separate Chapman from E. V. Rieu. It is in this sense that Walter Benjamin asserts the eschatological role - the idea of an enterprise carried out above and beyond the actual *parole* of language - of the translator. Or, as Franz Rosenzweig put it:

Every translation is a messianic act, which brings redemption nearer.³³

³²The date of the **language** of each version is stressed, and the '>' sign - 'changed to' - is used to imply an edition or recension.

³³Quoted in Steiner, p.244.

8.2 Nightingale Fever

Marina Tsvetayeva to Rainer Maria Rilke, July 6th 1926:

Writing poetry is in itself translating, from the mother tongue into another, whether French or German should make no difference. No language is the mother tongue. Writing poetry is rewriting it.³⁴

I have attempted, using the terms of Benjamin's paradigm of translation, to reconstitute the relationship between Helena Morley's Diary in the original and in translation; it now remains to satisfy the requirements of Borges and Steiner, in that order. Steiner's idea of the 'imaginary felt presence' of a literary tradition behind any self-conscious translation of a work of literature will, as has already been pointed out, require an account of the Brazilian antecedents of the Diary - the particular 'ghosts' of which its translator had to be continually aware - and this I shall be attempting in Section 3 of this chapter. To satisfy Borges's demand for a recognition of the different readings to which one text can be subjected in two different cultural contexts, I recognize no less of a need for a sketch of the literary milieu of Elizabeth Bishop and her contemporaries, as well.

In Ronald Hingley's book *Nightingale Fever* (1982) he charts the relationship between four of the greatest Russian poets of this century: Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetayeva, Anna Akhmatova, and Osip Mandelstam. If we consider the close ties - personal, poetic, and political - between the first three of these writers, we may find a precedent for 'placing' Elizabeth Bishop in relation to two of her own contemporaries: Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell.

Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop were close friends and also close poetic collaborators (Lowell said in a review of Bishop's first book *North & South* (1946) that 'Although Bishop would be unimaginable without Moore, her poems add something to the original, and are quite as genuine'³⁵). Unlike Anna

³⁴Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetayeva, and Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters Summer 1926*, edited by Yevgeny Pasternak, Yelena Pasternak and Konstantin M. Azadovsky, translated by Margaret Wettlin and Walter Arndt (Oxford, 1988), p.169.

³⁵Robert Lowell, *Collected Prose*, edited by Robert Giroux (London, 1987), p.78.

Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetayeva, who also addressed verses to each other, there was little rivalry between them (though Bishop does complain of the theft of an occasional phrase in her 'Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore'³⁶). Bishop goes on to make it clear that the relationship was like that with a maiden aunt or very much older sister, and perhaps this difference in generations explains the stability of the influence³⁷:

Marianne once gave me her practical rules for the use of indecent language. She said, 'Ordinarily, I would never use the word *rump*. But I can perfectly well say to Mother, "Mother, there's a thread on your *rump*["], because *she* knows that I'm referring to Cowper's pet hare, "Old Tiney," who liked to play on the carpet and "swing his rump around!"'³⁸

The relationship between Bishop and Lowell may have been slightly more important for him than her (judging, at any rate, from their surviving letters and dedications), whereas that between Tsvetayeva and Pasternak was more evenly weighted - but both male poets seem to have adopted their female counterparts as a sort of poetic conscience. This is seen most clearly in Lowell's account of the genesis of 'Skunk Hour', one of his most famous poems: 'The dedication is to Elizabeth Bishop, because rereading her suggested a way of breaking through the shell of my old manner. Her rhythms, idiom, images, and stanza structure seemed to belong to a later century. "Skunk Hour" is modeled on Miss Bishop's "The Armadillo," a much better poem and one I had heard her read and had later

³⁶Included in Bishop, *Prose*, pp.121-56 (p.141): 'I confess to one very slight grudge: she did use a phrase of mine once without a note. This may be childish of me, but I want to reclaim it ... I am sometimes appalled to think how much I may have unconsciously stolen from her. Perhaps we are all magpies.'

³⁷As in the poem 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore':

We can sit down and weep; we can go shopping,
or play at a game of constantly being wrong
with a priceless set of vocabularies,
or we can bravely deplore, but please
please come flying.

(Included in Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems 1927-1979* (London, 1984), pp.82-83 (p.83)). There is undoubtedly some gentle irony in that 'bravely deplore'.

³⁸Bishop, *Prose*, p.130.

carried around with me'³⁹. (The words might just as easily have come from one of the many letters in which Pasternak attempts to sum up the influence of Tsvetayeva's 'Poem of the End' or 'Poem of the Mountain' on him⁴⁰). This aspect of Bishop's and Lowell's friendship culminated in the letter which she wrote him after seeing the first version of his autobiographical poem *The Dolphin* (1973):

One can use one's life [as] material - one does, anyway - but these letters [from Lowell's second wife] - aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission - IF you hadn't changed them ... etc. *But art just isn't worth that much.* I keep remembering Hopkins' marvellous letter to Bridges about the idea of a 'gentleman' being the highest thing ever conceived - higher than a 'Christian' even, certainly than a poet. It is not being 'gentle' to use personal, tragic, anguished letters that way - it's cruel.⁴¹

We can, then, see almost a chain of literary decorum stretching from Moore to Bishop and on to Lowell - a set of (half-mocking) attitudes towards words which mirror a deadly seriousness about the 'material' of one's life. Extending the discussion to include the role of 'Helena Morley' - a work of art which '*really happened*' - in Bishop's creative life, translation holds once again, I think, the key to reconciling the two.

Going back to the quotation from Tsvetayeva with which I prefaced this section, one is struck by her claim that: 'Writing poetry is in itself translating'. Like the Russians, our three American poets had always two different reasons for translating foreign poets into English. On the one hand, on the technical level, there was the notion of 'keeping one's hand in' when other inspiration was lacking. As Lowell put it:

I believe that poetic translation - I would call it an imitation - must be expert and inspired, and needs at least as much technique, luck and rightness of my hand as an original poem.⁴²

³⁹Lowell, *Prose*, p.227.

⁴⁰See, for example, *Letters Summer 1926*, pp.22 & 43-47.

⁴¹Quoted in Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (London, 1983), p.423.

⁴²Lowell, *Prose*, p.233.

On the other hand, in both cases, there is an element of political and cultural protest about this insistence in immersing oneself in the poetry of foreign predecessors and contemporaries.

If one casts, say, William Carlos Williams and Robert Frost as representing a poetry embedded 'in the American grain' - in conscious reaction against the cosmopolitanism of Eliot and Pound - then Lowell, Moore and Bishop might be seen as the first poets to become internal emigrés in America. In protest against the 'know-nothingism' of their compatriots, they adopted an almost exaggeratedly mandarin stance - but one that also emphasized the extent to which American tradition is European tradition. Thus Lowell's early poems use seventeenth century metaphysical techniques to evoke the history of New England; thus the erudite and complex diction of Moore's lyrics (whether describing an engraving of Dürer's or an animal at the zoo); and thus the allegorical dream-landscapes ('Like Kafka's'⁴³, to quote Robert Lowell) of Bishop's 'The Man-Moth', 'The Map' and 'The Gentleman from Shallot'. Their actual translations became almost necessary adjuncts of this stance - proof that this dependence on the past was not simply parasitism but creative cooperation. Lowell, then, translated Racine, Baudelaire, and Aeschylus in separate volumes; Propertius and Dante in the context of his own books of poems; and a range of poets from the Greeks to Pasternak in *Imitations* (1961), his show-piece in the genre. Moore, predictably, was more exclusive and concentrated - choosing to confine herself to the *Fables* of La Fontaine, a selection of which she published in 1954.

Bishop writes interestingly of this enterprise:

A conflict between traditional rhymes and meters came during the seven years (1946-53) Marianne worked on translating La Fontaine's *Fables*. For my own amusement, I had already made up a completely unscientific theory that Marianne was possessed of a unique, involuntary sense of rhythm, therefore of meter, quite unlike anyone else's. She looked like no one else; she talked like no one else; her poems showed a mind not much like anyone else's; and her notions of meter and rhyme were unlike all the conventional notions - so why not believe that the old English meters that still seem natural to most of us ... were not natural to

⁴³Lowell, *Prose*, p.78.

her at all? That Marianne from birth, physically, had been set going to a different rhythm?

... Marianne was doing her best, one saw, to go *umpty-umpty-um* when she sensed that La Fontaine had gone that way, but it seemed to be almost - I use the word again - physically impossible for her to do so.⁴⁴

She concludes that these translations 'made me realize more than I ever had before the rarity of true originality, and also the sort of alienation it might involve'. Translation can thus be seen also as a way of adjusting to the outside world - of measuring your own conceptions against those of others; and, by making the one fit the other, seeming yourself to fit in better.

Bishop's translations are significantly different both in character and intention from those of Moore and Lowell. La Fontaine and the poets Lowell 'imitates' were all readily accessible to their audience - if not in the original, at any rate in other translations. The point of the exercise was therefore the virtuosity with which the exchange had been managed - almost, an attempt to defamiliarize the too familiar. With Bishop, on the other hand, the works she chose - the Brazilian poets in the *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry* (1972), which she co-edited; *Minha Vida de Menina*; and even (at the time) Octavio Paz - were all more or less unknown to the English-speaking public. This gave her both greater licence and a greater responsibility. It also provided a clearer set of echoes in her own life and writing.

This is shown in two ways - first, as an influence on her own choice of subjects (it seems probable that the autobiographical narratives which she began writing in the early sixties were as much influenced by the technique and tone of Helena's Diary as by the example of Lowell's poetic memoir '91 Revere St' in *Life Studies* (1959)⁴⁵); and secondly, as an extension of the attitude towards composition

⁴⁴Bishop, *Prose*, pp.139-40.

⁴⁵In order, after the two stories 'In the Village' and 'Gwendolyn' (1953), the following autobiographical items are included in Bishop, *Prose*: 'Primer Class' (c.1960), 'The Country Mouse' (c.1961), 'The U.S.A. School of Writing' (c.1966) 'A Trip to Vigia' (c.1967), 'To the Botequim & Back' (c.1970), and 'Memories of Uncle Neddy' (1977).

already displayed in her own work. As Marianne Moore put it, in her review of 'Senhora Helena':

That a translator should share the qualities of work translated, Miss Bishop exemplifies in her gift for fantasy, her use of words and hyper-precise eye. The attitude to life revealed by the Diary, Helena's apperceptiveness, and innate accuracy, seem a double portrait; the exactness of observation in the introduction being an extension, in manner, of Miss Bishop's verse and other writing, as when she differentiates between marbleized or painted window-frames to imitate stone, and stone ones painted to imitate grained wood⁴⁶.

To sum up, then, the significance of 'Helena Morley' in Bishop's own *oeuvre* is almost that of a 'double portrait'. Moore meant this phrase to mean that Bishop's translation was as much about herself as about Helena Morley (or Dona Alice Brant), but one could also take it to imply a general reaction to culture 'South of the border'. The late forties and early fifties, when Bishop first left the United States to live in Brazil, were the period of the Latin American 'boom' in American popular culture. Carmen Miranda, *Gilda* (1946), *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), even Bob Hope and Bing Crosby's *Road to Rio* (1947) are all examples of the assimilation of a vulgarized form of 'South American' culture into North American life. To Bishop, on the other hand, life in South America meant escape from the over-familiar, the too-thoroughly assimilated. Seeing past the patina of cultural assumptions which overlaid all aspects of Western life had become impossible, so Bishop in her early writing had had to take refuge in fantasy ('The Man-Moth', 'The Gentleman of Shalott') and dressing up the ordinary ('The Fish', 'The Monument'). In Brazil, though, life was literally (in the words of her introduction to the Diary) 'as fresh as paint'⁴⁷ - she had said of the Cuban 'primitive' painter Gregorio Valdes 'it seems that some people receive certain "gifts" merely by remaining unwittingly in an undemocratic state of grace', and it is surely these same qualities of 'freshness, flatness, and remoteness'⁴⁸ that

⁴⁶The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore, edited by Patricia C. Willis (London, 1987), p.524.

⁴⁷Bishop, Prose, p.109.

⁴⁸Bishop, Prose, pp.58-59.

she is attempting to emulate in poems like 'Arrival at Santos':

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery:
impractically shaped and - who knows? - self-pitying mountains,
sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,

With a little church on top of one.⁴⁹

Instead of having to attach exotic features to the quotidian, here all the exoticism is provided by the surroundings - all Bishop needs to do is exercise a classical restraint in describing it. There is a coast, and a harbour, some mountains with a church on top of one - but it is Bishop's refusal to dress up her material, to impose the customary features of landscape 'evocation' which make the Brazilian poems in *Questions of Travel* (1965) and the later volumes remarkable. In 'The Riverman', for example, she speaks in the voice of an Amazonian Indian who wishes to become a witch doctor by visiting the spirits at night - the situation is enough; no further elaboration is required. Her task is simply to suppress all expressions of surprise or wonder, to eschew ornate diction, and to convey an impression of what it is to be this man. His certainties, for the period of the poem, must become ours.

Translation, too, is part of this process. Not just in 'Helena Morley', but in the many poems she translated from the Brazilian, Bishop subordinates herself to the task of letting another voice speak, and - having chosen that voice, those surroundings, with care - succeeds in speaking as herself more truly than before. Just as for Moore the process of poetic translation consists of 'proving she can do it', and, on a deeper level, of demonstrating that her novelties and the other poet's traditional form are, in essence, one and the same thing; so for Bishop the rejection of romanticism means finding the most 'romantic' and exotic of landscapes, and painting it with almost exaggerated restraint. Just as Lowell and Pasternak are forced by the 'year zero' of modern Russia and America to make a point of the assertion of tradition and continuity, so Bishop justifies her own sense of deracination (half-Canadian, half-American) and lack of a home by asserting

⁴⁹Bishop, *Poems*, p.89.

the fascinations of geography and travel. It is also significant, in this context, that 'It was only when she moved to Brazil in about 1950 that she lived with a woman permanently'⁵⁰ and gave up the attempt to hide her own homosexual identity. Again South America served to focus the arbitrariness of former cultural constraints.

Bishop, then, 'translates herself' - and her writing - through the shift to South America. 'Helena Morley' is, admittedly, only one part of this process - but a significant one, given the fact that it not only provided a model for her later prose, but also another vehicle for the precision and insight already achieved by her in her poems. Certainly it is a far more satisfactory one than the 'Time-Life' book about Brazil which she wrote in 1962. The example of Moore and Lowell (himself the author of poems about Buenos Aires and Brazil⁵¹), undoubtedly played a role in this transformation as well, but precisely how much is difficult to reconstruct from the meagre harvest of memoirs and letters that remain. The comparison with our three Russian poets has had to serve instead to focus both the generalized issues of translation and the specific dynamics of poetic influence. As Pasternak once put it:

translation is conceivable because for centuries before our time whole literatures have translated one another. Translation is not a method of getting to know isolated works; it is the channel whereby cultures and peoples communicate down the centuries.⁵²

The double exposure of Bishop's poetic culture on Brazil, of modern America on the Soviet Union, is perhaps as close as we can come in the discursive mode of the essay to that 'eschatological' moment of insight into the reality behind specific verbal forms which, according to Benjamin, is achieved by the ideal translator.

⁵⁰Quoted in Hamilton, p.135.

⁵¹Robert Lowell, *For the Union Dead*, (London, 1965), pp.60-62.

⁵²Quoted in Boris Pasternak, *Selected Poems*, translated by Jon Stallworthy and Peter France (Harmondsworth, 1984), p.12.

8.3 Minha Vida de Menina

We have, in a sense, already compiled a series of readings of *Minha Vida de Menina* - first (Bishop's own suggestion), as a childhood memoir, that genre exemplified by *The Diary of Anne Frank* or Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*; and secondly, as a work whose nature was to some extent defined by its divergence from Elizabeth Bishop's English translation. To an English-speaking reader, it is clear, the book must be an embodiment of the exotic - a compendium of the customs and attitudes of a small Brazilian town at the end of the nineteenth century. To a Brazilian, on the other hand, the book's 'Brazilian-ness' can hardly be so prominent, which means that stress is laid instead on nostalgia for a lost, innocent past.

What both of these readings have in common, though, is a sense of reassurance that an environment so alien (to the English or American reader), or an epoch so distant (to the Brazilian), should seem so familiar, so assimilable to one's own experience. Bishop acknowledges this ('odd, remote, and long ago, and yet fresh, sad, funny, and eternally true'⁵³), not only by comparing certain passages in the book with Homer or Mark Twain, but also in the indirect homage she paid it by taking over some of its tone - precision without sentimentality, a refusal to impose an adult perspective on childhood concerns - in her own autobiographical writings. The fact that it 'really happened', what is more, emphasizes the point that such alleged universals of human experience are not merely literary conventions, but have some basis in fact. Dona Alice, too, when she wrote her 1942 preface to the book, seemed to feel that it restored the divisions between her two selves - the child of 12 and the woman of 60 (however much this is belied by the style of the reflections written by each of them):

how beautiful life was then! And how many stories of my aunts and uncles, my cousins, my teachers, my schoolmates and friends, how many of my own outbursts and complaints - things I no longer remembered after so many years - came back to me when I reread my old notebooks!⁵⁴

⁵³Helena Morley, p.viii.

⁵⁴Helena Morley, p.xxxvi.

The purpose of this section, in contradistinction, is to emphasize the discordant elements in the Diary - the features just below the surface which belie this assumption of easy comprehension. This is not so much in order to contradict these other readings, as to place them in their proper perspective. I intend, therefore, to take two more-or-less contemporary works of Brazilian literature - Machado de Assis's novel *Helena* (1876 - revised 1905) and Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* - in order to tease out some aspects of Helena Morley's Brazilian context masked by the 'universalism' of the English translation.

Machado de Assis is generally regarded as Brazil's finest novelist, and his writing career spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The novel *Helena* is not one of his most celebrated works, but it has always been extremely popular - perhaps because of the unabashed romanticism of its plot. I have chosen it, therefore, not simply because of the coincidence of names (which is unlikely to have been particularly significant in Helena's milieu), but because it serves to highlight the sorts of themes common in the 'society literature' of the day.

Euclides da Cunha has already been discussed at some length in Chapter Four, so I will simply reiterate here the fact that the events described in *Os Sertões* took place in the mid-1890s (just after the end of the Diary), and that they were inspired by the same set of factors - the emancipation of the slaves, the fall of the Empire and consequent establishment of the Republic - to which Helena continually makes reference. Contrasting the two, then, seems a legitimate way of highlighting Helena's social and political concerns - the precise opposite, in some cases, of those of her 'papa'.

Society

Let us begin with a representative quotation from the Diary:

Perhaps it was mean of me to enjoy what I saw yesterday. I suppose I should have felt sorry to see such a pretty girl as Quita fall down like that in the middle of church, in a faint. But I can't help saying here that I liked the excitement very much. I'd never seen anyone have an attack and I thought it was all very amusing ... The boys should have been the ones to carry her but they all stood around with foolish faces ...

I thought Quita was lucky to have such pretty things to show when

they began to undo her clothes. Petticoat, corset-cover, corset, chemise, all embroidered and very pretty. We were all envious of the pretty things she had hidden. I left wondering what would happen to me if I had an attack like hers, I, who don't have anything pretty for the others to see ... I said to mama, 'When they undid her clothes and so many pretty things appeared, I was envious of the attack and thought it was all very romantic. But finally I thanked God it wasn't me.' Suddenly Luizinha had an idea. 'When you do have a lot of pretty underwear, you can pretend to have an attack like hers. I think it would be easy.'⁵⁵

Contrast this rather unedifying exchange with the following scene from de Assis's

Helena:

At the touch of Estacio's arm, she trembled and made a movement as if to push him from her but her broken strength played traitor to her sense of shame. As she looked at him her eyes were those of a wounded doe, her knees gave way beneath her, and her weakened body would have sunk to the ground if Estacio's hands had not held her.

'Let me die!' she murmured.

'No!' he shouted. And with a swift gesture he lifted her limp body in his arms and started toward the house. The wind lashed them brutally; a sudden downpour of rain streamed over them in an immense sheet of water. Estacio kept going as fast as the weight of Helena's body permitted. Her head hung back toward the earth; her lips uttered disconnected, senseless phrases.⁵⁶

At first sight, one is tempted to say that the second passage is like the first retold from Quita's point of view - allowing for Gerty MacDowell-like exaggeration - but this is not quite sufficient to explain the disparities. Given the different genres - romantic novel and diary - it is natural enough that the boys in Helena's account 'all stood around with foolish faces', while the other Helena's foster-brother (and lover) Estacio 'with a swift gesture ... lifted her limp body in his arms' (in the first passage this role is left to Chiquinha, who 'is big and fat,

⁵⁵Helena Morley, pp.121-22.

⁵⁶Machado de Assis, *Helena: A Novel*, translated by Helen Caldwell (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), p.193.

[while] Quita is small and thin'⁵⁷). The different reactions of the two Helenas to the question of underclothes is more notable, however. Earlier in the novel 'Helena' (whom I will refer to thus in order to distinguish her from the author of the Diary) has gone riding with her brother:

Dona Ursula had lent her a riding habit ... The dress fitted her badly: it was much too large for the slender, girlish figure, but her natural elegance made one forget the accessory of clothing.⁵⁸

There is rather an ogling, roguish tone about this forgetting the 'accessory of clothing' - but one feels certain that 'Helena', at least, has not forgotten it. As Helen Caldwell, the translator, remarks in her preface, 'The author does not permit us to know the workings of her mind. We are allowed to see her actions and hear her conversation; we see her smile and weep, but we are never privy to her thoughts'⁵⁹. In short, then, what appears to be the romantic idealization of the character 'Helena' in the first quotation stems from the fact that the entire narrative is portrayed from Estacio's point of view. It may be that 'Helena' is worried about her underwear as she is being rushed to the house - the laws of 'significant omission' (anything physical, anything likely to seem bathetic), in such novels leave this a matter for speculation. Far from being a case of immature lack of comprehension of 'adult' affairs, then, Helena's diary presents us with the hidden side of such narratives - the quotidian concerns which have been rejected as not sufficiently portentous. She shapes her stories into anecdotes, it is true, but she lacks the kind of internal censor, based on the external constraints of hierarchical Brazilian society, which it took Machado de Assis so long to break through.

His account of a ball given by the do Valle family is intensely conventional:

The night's festivities proceeded at a lively pace although the party was small. Some whirling waltzes, two or three quadrilles, cards, music, much conversation and laughter, such was the programme

⁵⁷ Helena Morley, p.122.

⁵⁸ de Assis, p.39.

⁵⁹ de Assis, p.vii.

that filled the night's hours and made them short.⁶⁰

There is, it is true, much going on below the surface, but it is all of a type proper to balls - love affairs, betrothals and ambitious intrigues. In the Diary, by contrast, the particularities of emotion - embarrassment, indecision, fear of failure - which underlie such public events are intimated by an anecdote about another 'de Assis', her Uncle's clerk João, who cannot choose between a widow and an unmarried girl:

Today we laughed at him until we couldn't laugh any longer. He was invited to the dance last night at the Workmen's Society and the widow went, too. He got a dictionary, looked up the words, made up a sentence and went to Sérgio to see if it was nice enough to say to the widow. The sentence was: 'I feel great compunction at not having been able to invite you to a waltz up until now.' Sérgio pointed out to him that if the widow was a woman he had the gender wrong. He corrected the sentence, memorized it, and put the piece of paper in his pocket.

Today Sérgio asked him if he'd said the sentence without any trouble and he answered, 'Oh dear! When I went over to speak to her, before I could begin she got up, took my arm, and we started dancing. I was completely dumb because she didn't give me a chance to say the only words I had in my head.'⁶¹

João's situation is not unlike that of Estacio, who is betrothed to the daughter of a close friend while falling more in love every day with his foster-sister 'Helena', but the difference in the way the two situations is presented is immense. Helena sees it as an occasion for farce, and very successfully conveys that feeling we have all had of carefully preparing a speech only to have its delivery forestalled by circumstances. Machado de Assis, on the other hand, forces himself to inhabit Estacio's own priggish mind - and to present everything in terms of 'duty' and 'family honour'.

It is not that Helena's acuity is unique (though it is very creditable for a 14-year-old). On the contrary, I have already mentioned that the business of the

⁶⁰de Assis, p.78.

⁶¹Helena Morley, p.209.

underwear reminds us of the 'Nausicaa' episode in *Ulysses* (1922)⁶², and of course a girl's first experience of a ball has been evoked by Tolstoy's Natasha Rostova as well as by Katherine Mansfield. The point is, rather, that the setting and many of the events of *Helena* and Helena's diary are identical. They record the same customs and observances (though the characters in the novel are far more prosperous and well-born) - but the rigid laws of genre, echoes as these are of more widespread constraints in society, prohibit Machado de Assis from dwelling upon such 'low' things as underwear or embarrassment. To do him justice, his essentially Modernist sensibility is expressed far more cogently in the later novels - hymns to nihilism and futility; but 'Helena' herself, his first great heroine, could, it seems, only find a voice in the as yet unpublished observations of a coolly scrutinizing young girl.

Politics

Today my father, like everyone else in town, is very pleased about Prudente de Moraes' taking office. There was joy in town when the telegram came, and everybody rejoiced as if it had been something for us. But papa says it's because nobody here likes Floriano, and they didn't expect he'd give up his office to Prudente, because he has great influence with the army ... I always say to papa that I can't get through my head why a change in presidents has any effect on us here in Diamantina. Papa says it has, because the government is a well-organized machine and that a good president and a good government benefits all Brazil and even us. I told him I'd only believe it if the president gave us water-pipes and repaired our streets. He said that those things aren't done by the president, in Rio de Janeiro, they're only done by a local man like Dr. Mata, who could even have a railroad built from here to Ouro Preto. If there's something I have no hope for in Diamantina, it's a railroad. But we don't really need

⁶²As well as recalling a similar exchange between Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore recorded in 'Efforts of Affection':

Several times over the years Marianne asked me abruptly, 'Elizabeth, what do you have on under your dress? How much underwear do you wear?' I would enumerate my two or perhaps three undergarments, and Marianne would say, 'Well, I know that I [or, Mother and I] wear many too many.'

(Bishop, *Prose*, p.133).

one. Horseback is good enough.⁶³

This political debate between Helena and her father might be said to sum up the arguments for political quietism and political activism - or scepticism against optimism. Helena accepts that her father knows more than she does about the workings of government, but she cannot see that all this has any appreciable effect on their own daily lives. This is, to be sure, a trifle naive - when one considers that the 'Floriano' to whom she refers is the victor of a bloody civil war, only just over, and that the 1888 freeing of the slaves, which she herself recalls, had given rise to the abdication of the Emperor and the founding of the Republic - but in the sense that these 'distant' events had made little impact on their poverty-stricken living conditions, there is a good deal of truth in her observations:

I still remember when the news of the law of the 13th of May [emancipating the slaves] came. The negroes all stopped working and got together in front of the house, dancing and singing that they were free and didn't want to work any more. Grandma, angry at all the shouting, went to the door and threatened them with her cane, and said, 'Away from my house, you good-for-nothings! Freedom came, but not for you, for me! Get out!' The negroes shut up and went to the *senzala*. In a little while Joaquim Angola came in the name of all the others to ask her pardon, and to say that they all wanted to stay.⁶⁴

Helena was a little girl at the time, and (not surprisingly, given the way in which she was brought up), a little racist; nor does she really discuss the issues involved - but, in another sense, she was less blinkered to the facts of the situation than those who designed it. The emancipation meant nothing without a solid new economic infrastructure to support those who had been 'freed'. Not that this was an argument for perpetuating the *status quo*, but it at least explains why nothing significant changed in the economy of Diamantina.

The contrast with the sorts of analysis conducted by Euclides da Cunha - seemingly omniscient as geographer, historian and anthropologist - is extreme.

⁶³Helena Morley, p.168.

⁶⁴Helena Morley, p.177.

Helena can see no benefit in political processes because they provoke a lot of argument and bad feeling without leaving anything tangible behind them; Euclides da Cunha is suspicious of a system which can generate an immense absurdity such as the Canudos campaign. In Diamantina, the politicians care too little; in the Backlands, they cared too much. True, da Cunha sees the conflict between the prosperous South and impoverished North-East as in many ways inevitable, but his comprehension - and rationalization - of the principles involved make him in a sense an accomplice to the crime. He can be seen to represent the viewpoint of Helena's father - a good government is of direct or indirect benefit to all its people (which is true but a truism), and one must therefore intervene to make the government as good as possible. Helena, on the other hand, sees such participation as absurd ('What I think is funniest on election day is that everyone takes sides and nobody forgives anyone who votes the other way. There's so much excitement in the town that one would think it really mattered to us. After the election nobody remembers it any more'⁶⁵), and also as counterproductive, since it encourages bad feeling without giving anything back. Who, after all, she sagely concludes, really needs a railway?

The two positions are impossible to resolve, but Helena's is a more subtle and cogent one than might at first be credited. Women were, of course, scarcely encouraged to enter political debate in a society as paternalist as Brazil's - but the impoverished economy of Diamantina depended so largely on their efforts that their participation had to be solicited as well. The global view of a da Cunha is perhaps necessary to understand a cataclysm like Canudos, but even there - as Mario Vargas Llosa has shown in *La guerra del fin del mundo* - human, domestic, 'small-town' virtues are on a scale more appropriate to most human beings.

Thus, to conclude, we see that despite Dr. Brant's insistence on stopping the extracts from the Diary at the onset of Helena's adolescence, a sufficiently mature and complex picture of the society of Diamantina has emerged. We cannot see Helena's first essays in love - but we have her comments on its mechanisms all the same; nor do we hear her remarks on the impact of the Canudos casualty lists in

⁶⁵ Helena Morley, p.106.

1897 - but her views on presidential elections make the focus of her vision clear enough. What is more, it could be argued that Helena, whose limitations as a writer (immaturity, lack of experience of other places) have been announced in advance, gives both a more knowledgeable and a less prejudiced picture of Diamantina and its people than the seemingly 'objective' Richard Burton twenty-five years before.

Helena, then, to return to our original *point d'appui*, becomes the ideal choice for the North American Woman Poet Elizabeth Bishop. Each of these attributes - American, Woman, and Poet - is important to the argument, because each is a potential source of alienation. Born in the United States but brought up in Canada, Bishop never felt assimilated into the almost oppressive sense of identity demanded of most Americans. As a Poet, she rejected the stale rhetoric and themes of much of the literary establishment, conditioned as these were by a male poet/ female muse arrangement. As a Woman and a homosexual, she found the *mores* of her native land oppressive.

Brazil offered the answer to each of these dilemmas in turn. True, it had been written about extensively by her compatriots, but never with the insight and precision of someone who lived and belonged there. What is more, in placing her emphasis on indigenous poetry and writings, she could model herself on them, instead of subjecting them to the overwhelming weight of European 'New World' traditions. The minimalism of Helena Morley is thus ideal for her purposes - a writer who debates each question and incident as it comes, but is prepared finally to leave her conclusions open; someone whose deployment of rhetoric is confined to that associated with oral anecdote; and, finally, an America that seems for the first time to be presented as something natural, seen through its own eyes, instead of as a distorting mirror for the Old.

From Aphra Behn to Elizabeth Bishop, then, is not quite so large a leap as it might otherwise seem. Behn's technique in *Oroonoko*, as we have seen, consists of simultaneously sustaining and inverting the accepted commonplaces of 'Edenic' South America - an Adam and Eve who are black, a native race whose customs are admired because they outnumber the Europeans. Bishop, on the other hand, has the added resource of the writings of 'native' Brazilians and Latin Americans

(albeit descendants of the original conquerors); and she thus makes out of translation itself - both from one language, and from one cultural context to another - the material of a similarly original vision.

In my final, concluding chapter, I shall be examining the implications of this novel twist in the fortunes of 'South America' as an icon of the European imagination, by attempting to provide a critical paradigm which can reconcile the twin influences of the traditional Western mythologies charted by us so far, and the force of the Latin American magic realist writing which is now being exercised in translation.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: The Idea of the Post-modern

9.1 Southern Gothic

A quota system is to be introduced on fiction set in South America. The intention is to curb the spread of package-tour baroque and heavy irony. Ah, the propinquity of cheap life and expensive principles, of religion and banditry, of surprising honour and random cruelty. Ah, the daiquiri bird which incubates its eggs on the wing; ah, the fredonna tree whose roots grow at the tips of its branches, and whose fibres assist the hunchback to impregnate by telepathy the haughty wife of the hacienda owner; ah, the opera house now overgrown by jungle. Permit me to rap on the table and murmur 'Pass!'¹

This, one of the prescriptions for modern literature made by Geoffrey Braithwaite, the hero of Julian Barnes' novel-parody *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), is typical of many other expressions of discontent at the 'boom' in Latin American settings and narrative devices in the contemporary novel.

Other witnesses to this disgruntlement include Anthony Burgess² and Julian Rivers, who remarked at the 1988 British Book Marketing Council conference that 'the push would be for "genuine books - not junk", and particularly not for "dead gay South American writers"'³. It is difficult to know to whom Mr. Rivers was referring - García Lorca is dead and gay, but not South American; Neruda is dead and South American, but not gay; Manuel Puig is alive and well and living in New York - but his general point is clear enough. In the eyes of many commentators, South American 'magic realism' and all its attendant features (hunchbacks, ghosts, bestiality, etc.), has become the late twentieth century equivalent of Southern Gothic. Just as waves of influence emanated out from William Faulkner to Katharine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, and Robert Penn Warren, only to lose themselves in a maze of imitations and pastiche; so novels

¹ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (London, 1985), p.99.

² See Martin, p.142.

³ Quoted in 'In Brief', *TLS*, 7 October 1988, p.1108.

like Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* have inspired copiers both indigenous (Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* (1982)), and foreign (Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Lisa St Aubin de Têran's *Keepers of the House* (1982) and Lawrence Thornton's *Imagining Argentina* (1987)).

This is, at any rate, the 'view from abroad' - the natural conclusion to be drawn from the simultaneous existence (in translation) of strong, original works by Cortázar, García Márquez and Vargas Llosa, and later, weaker novels by a variety of successors both Western and Latin American. It is also, however, to my mind, a dangerous over-simplification, and one which takes no account of the sort of evidence which has been marshalled in this study. The first point to be made in this connection is that, in placing such emphasis on South America as the seeding ground of contemporary 'magic realism', Julian Barnes is largely ignoring the English-language tradition of portrayals of the continent - the subject of most of our discussion up to now.

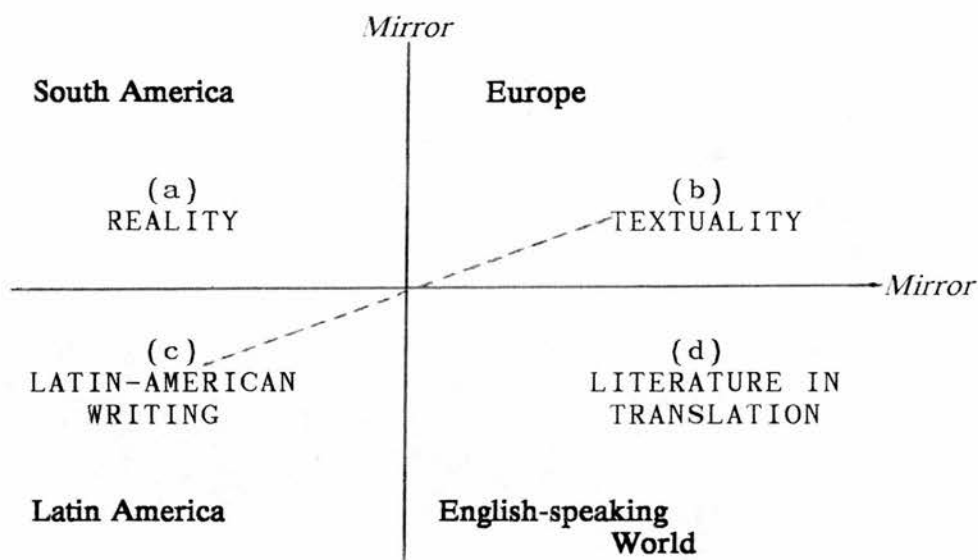
The picture presented here of the narrative strategies adopted by a number of authors in order to construct a textual adjunct to 'South America' has ranged chronologically from Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* to Elizabeth Bishop's translation of *The Diary of 'Helena Morley'*, and generically from the scientific notations of Darwin's *Journal of Researches* to the imaginary landscapes of Masfield's *Sard Harker*. I have tried throughout to avoid giving any impression of an 'advance' or evolution in attitudes during this span of time, since it is by no means my view that (say) the sophistication of Conrad's *Nostromo* is due to its being two hundred years later than Aphra Behn, but it is undoubtedly true that the set of influences and attitudes - both technical and ideological - acting on any one of our authors must be seen partly as a function of the periods in which they came to intellectual maturity. The choice of these seven authors has therefore been conditioned as much by the 'iconographic' forces to which each of them bears witness, as by the intrinsic interest of their books.

In this concluding chapter I hope to employ the generic and chronological distinctions already made in the body of the thesis to offer both a more satisfactory account of the genealogy of contemporary mythologizers of 'South

America' than that suggested by Barnes or Burgess - and, in the process, a revised model of the relationship between European and Latin American portrayals of the continent. This should also throw some retrospective light on the two questions highlighted in my preface - how can 'South America' be effectively differentiated from the physical South America? and in what ways does this 'South America' differ from the 'Africa', 'South-East Asia' and 'Polynesia' of the European imagination? - questions which have been present at the borders of our inquiry ever since.

The second point to be made about Barnes' model is, then, following on from our discussion in Chapter Eight, the extent of its reliance on Translation (just as Discovery acted as the principle vehicle of textual information about the New World for Aphra Behn, Natural Science for Darwin, Historiography for Prescott and Cunningham Graham, and the techniques of Romance for Hudson, Conrad and Masfield). However, again, just as those earlier 'versions' relied for their effect on a contrast between the physical South America and the literary conventions surrounding it; so translations of Latin American fiction exist as imperfect mirrors - because interpreted according to an alien tradition (Like Borges' Pierre Menard) - of their Spanish or Portuguese originals. As a result, we must extend our original Barthean paradigm of the physical South America as *la Chine*, and 'South America' as his mythologized *sinité* to include both Latin American literature (which offers another 'mirror' of the geographical reality), and its translations into European culture - literal (Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Isabel Allende), and figurative (in works set in South America and influenced by its contemporary literature - Angela Carter, Lisa St Aubin de T  ran, and Lawrence Thornton).

The point might be better made in a diagram:



Thus, we have a place - (a) - described and rationalized according to European literary conventions - (b). This is an example of direct reflection, but (b) also influences the writing of the indigenous inhabitants - (c) - who nevertheless possess certain internal paradigms of representation. Indigenous writing is then translated back into European culture - (d) - which has two consequences: 1/ it inevitably comes to mean something different in its new cultural and linguistic context; and 2/ as a consequence it influences (b) in a turn-around way.

The first part of this process, (a) to (b), has already been fully dealt with - and all of the authors so far mentioned, from Columbus to Conrad, exemplify it to some degree. The transition from (b) to (c) is also well represented in our argument to date. We have seen how Sarmiento's *Facundo* exemplifies a whole series of 'textualizing' techniques, from pastoral to anthropology. Other authors like Vargas Llosa, Octavio Paz and Gabriel García Márquez have also assisted us in elaborating this set of 'Western' strategies of representation. The increasing numbers of translations from (c) to (d) in the second half of this century (and particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, the period of the 'boom' in the Latin American novel), has, however, upset this orderly picture.

When Gabriel García Márquez said 'Graham Greene me enseñó nada menos que a descifrar el trópico'⁴, and went on to claim that 'Con ese método se puede reducir todo el enigma del trópico a la fragancia de una guayaba podrida'⁵, it became clear that Greene's celebrated 'seediness' had been used as one of the models for Macondo. This supplied at least a partial answer to Gerald Martin's question (quoted in my preface, above) about the source of the appeal to 'Anglo-American' readers of the 'tropical "Greenland"' of magic realism - they were responding to what they already knew only too well. But the implications of the remark go beyond that. Since García Márquez's vision, in its turn, has supplied the inspiration and the form for a whole series of novels - Carter's and de Tóran's above mentioned, as well as Zulfikar Ghose's *A New History of Torments* (1982) and *Don Bueno* (1983), Christopher Burns' *Snakewrist* (1986), and Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime* (1988)⁶ - it is clear that the influences exerted on each of these novels must be seen as at least double. In other words, if Greene taught García Márquez 'a descifrar el trópico' (having learnt it himself from Conrad), and García Márquez inspired Western writers like Carter and Thornton to blend mythology and history into 'magic realism', then these latter authors have become simultaneously translators from another culture (Latin America) and heirs to a European tradition of which they may, paradoxically, be less aware⁷.

⁴García Márquez, *El olor de la guayaba*, p.43: 'Graham Greene taught me how to decipher the tropics, no less.' (translations quoted from García Márquez, *The Fragrance of Guava* - page numbers thus (32)).

⁵García Márquez, *El olor de la guayaba*, p.44: 'Using this method you can reduce the whole enigma of the tropics to the fragrance of a rotten guava.' (32).

⁶Indeed, Gerald Martin claims that 'since the 1960s many of the most important new writers - Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, Umberto Eco - have had to become "Latin American" novelists'. (Martin, p.7).

⁷Another example of this 'double-influence' from (b) to (c), and then from (d) to (b) is supplied by Isabel Allende, a model for modern women writers like Christine Bell (*Saint* (1985)) and Charlotte Méndez (*Condor and Hummingbird* (1986)), who began her literary career as a translator of Barbara Cartland novels into Spanish, 'subversively rewriting them to make the heroines stronger characters' - though, as Antony Beevor, one of the reviewers of her second novel *Of Love and Shadows*, remarks: 'It is almost as if Allende ... had in the end been slightly corrupted by the contact.' (TLS, 10 July 1987, p.740).

The major novelists we have already looked at, Conrad, Hudson and Masfield, attempted to project and articulate an entire world as an expression of their vision of South America. Writers from this later era (what might be called 'the age of translation'), such as Bishop and Carter, seem more often to re-arrange one which comes to them ready-made, and - far from expending pains to make it seem solid - positively delight in its flimsiness as a construct (as we will see later in our discussion of Angela Carter's and Kathy Acker's 'post-modern' landscapes). Their dependence on traditional mythologies as providers of material to subvert, rather than as structures to be filled out, is shown by an increasing attention to translation in the Borgesian rather than the Benjaminian sense - as a vehicle of cultural relativity and contingency. In order to demonstrate the implications of this procedure, I propose to examine Carter's novel *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* at some length, showing the ways in which it fulfills the paradigms already described in the body of the thesis - as well as detailing the divergences brought about by the impact of post-modernism on the Arts in general.

9.2 The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman

Angela Carter's novel is divided into eight chapters, each one designed to strip away another mask or screen (like the peep-show, repository of Dr. Hoffman's 'set of samples', which begins the protagonist Desiderio's quest), from the 'reality' finally revealed. I therefore propose to go through it sequentially, discussing the issues raised by each discrete section as it comes. This procedure also has the advantage of supplying a kind of textual rhyme to the eight chapters of this study of versions of South America in English literature - highlighting, as it does, the similar issues dealt with by both investigations.

I shall accordingly begin by asking where the novel is set. The question is by no means as simple as it seems, as Carter leaves us in considerable doubt on the point until quite a late stage in the narrative - nor is this the result of a desire to leave it in an undefined 'otherwhere', the realm of fairy tales. On the contrary, she lavishes a great deal of descriptive power on very precise details of 'race and place' - nationalities, and character-studies in terms of such traits. (Would it be too far-fetched to equate this reluctance to name her setting with the generalized nature of the mythological evocation of 'alien-ness' in the European narrative tradition? - It is a thought worth bearing in mind as we proceed).

9.2.1 The City Under Siege

The city was built on a tidal river and the slums and the area around the docks still pullulated with blacks, browns and Orientals who lived in a picturesque squalor the city fathers in their veranda'd suburbs contrived to ignore. Yet the city ... was just a little nervous, all the same. It hardly ever dared peer over its well-upholstered shoulder in case it glimpsed the yellow mountains louring far towards the north, atavistic reminders of the interior of a continent which inspired a wordless fear in those who had come here so lately. The word 'indigenous' was unmentionable. Yet some of the buildings, dating from the colonial period, were impressive ... stone memorials of a past to which few, if any, of us had contributed though, since I was of Indian extraction, I suffered the ironic knowledge that my forefathers had anointed the foundations of the state with a good deal of their blood.⁸

We are told a good deal in this passage from the first chapter of Carter's novel - the 'tidal river', the 'blacks, browns and Orientals' who 'pullulate' around the docks, above all the 'exiled scum of Europe'⁹ (her personification of the city), suggest one of the great colonial cities - Hong Kong, Bombay or Shanghai. 'Blacks, browns and Orientals' is suitably unspecific, too - the first implying, presumably, Africa; the second the East or West Indies, Oceania, Indonesia, India, or America; and the third Asia. 'Veranda'd suburbs' is suggestive also - verandah is a Portuguese word, but the concept, again, applies to any tropical port around the equator. 'Yellow mountains ... far towards the North' could be the Himalayas, if this is India; the Andes, if this is equatorial South America; the Mountains of the Moon, if it is Africa; or Tibet, if it is China. 'The interior of a continent which inspired a wordless fear' would apply equally well to any of these - Asia, Africa, India, or South America.

The description seems, in fact, almost a textbook illustration of the interchangeable nature of the mythological imagery associated with each of these regions in European tradition. However, when our narrator, Desiderio, the old man who is telling this story of his youth for the benefit of the younger inhabitants

⁸ Angela Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (Harmondsworth, 1987), p.16.

⁹ Carter, Hoffman, p.16.

of the city, appears on the scene, things suddenly become more specific. 'I was of Indian extraction', and therefore, it is implied, 'indigenous'. This narrows our speculations considerably - the city could still be Bombay, but not Shanghai or Cape Town (unless one were prepared to postulate a use of the word 'Indian' to imply simply a native inhabitant). The West Indies, South or Central America, and the Indian subcontinent - these are the practical possibilities, given the way in which the word is used.

But, only a little further on, Carter seems to mock such expectations of topographical fixity in the following passage, describing the siege of dreams conducted by the abominable Dr. Hoffman:

A group of chanting pillars exploded in the middle of a mantra and lo! they were once again street lamps until, with night, they changed to silent flowers. Giant heads in the helmets of conquistadors sailed up like sad, painted kites over the giggling chimney pots ... the city was no longer the conscious production of humanity; it had become the arbitrary realm of dream.¹⁰

'Mantra' is, of course, an Indian image - the flowers, too, remind us of the colourful trappings of Hinduism. 'Conquistadors' might be used here in the generalized sense of 'conquerors', but it tends to recall the fate of the New World Indians - especially the Aztecs and the Incas.

In a sense, all this squares very well with the city's having become the 'arbitrary realm of dream' - a post-colonial landscape which combines features of transplanted Europe and an overlay of native cultures, such as that evoked in Jan Morris's *Last Letters from Hav* (1984), or Alfred Kubin's Central Asian 'dream kingdom' in *Die andere Seite* (1909). One must, however, remember that a 'War of Dreams' (the title of the American edition of the book) is being waged between the Dr. Hoffman of the title and his adversary, the city's Minister of Determination. It may be in Hoffman's interests to obscure the city's origins and existential status, but the Minister is determined to keep it solidly in the realm of fact. In a sense, then, our efforts to ascertain the city's precise location through the agency of such 'dream-like' clues might be compared to an attempt to find

¹⁰Carter, *Hoffman*, p.18.

solid ground in a narrative which is being buffeted by a war on whose outcome depends the very information we are trying to uncover.

The next clue comes when Hoffman sends an emissary to negotiate with the Minister, sole leader of the resistance within the city. This ambassador was 'the most beautiful human being I [Desiderio] have ever seen'¹¹. ('He' later turns out to be Hoffman's daughter, Albertina):

Presumably he was either of Mongolian extraction or else he numbered among his ancestors, as I did, certain of the forgotten Indians who still linger miserably in the more impenetrable mountains or skulk along the waterways, for his skin was like polished brass, at once greenish and yellowish ... and his cheekbones unusually high.¹²

'Mongolian' suggests New World Indians, with their 'unusually high' cheekbones - nor is 'greenish and yellowish' an impossible characterization of the hue usually described as red ('like polished brass'). Mongolia and Tibet are undoubtedly nearer to India than America, but one wonders whether, even in the unspecified modernity in which the story is set, Indians could be described as 'forgotten' in their own country - 'pullulation' is a more conventional image for India's great coastal ports.

Further indications come further down:

his eyes ... were as hieratically brown and uncommunicative as those the Ancient Egyptians painted on their sarcophagi ...

All his gestures were instinct with a self-conscious but extraordinary reptilian liquidity ... I saw that he seemed to move in soft coils ...

He was a manicured leopard patently in complicity with chaos.¹³

Taken in order, these statements present us with first, a red herring, since we have already ruled out the possibility of Africa; second, a suggestive piece of 'serpent' imagery, given the omnipresence of that symbol in evocations of South America;

¹¹Carter, Hoffman, p.32.

¹²Carter, Hoffman, p.32.

¹³Carter, Hoffman, p.32.

and third, a leopard - or, in other words, an Old World animal which can, like Aphra Behn's 'tigers', be associated with New World cats like the jaguar.

In the light of this persistently ambiguous imagery - Egyptian sarcophagi, leopards, serpents, mantras, and Indians - it no longer seems paradoxical to claim that Carter is not simply failing to convey a precise 'sense of place' for her story, but that she has a point to make by this persistent mystification. South America (no single country or aspect of which has yet been named among the plethora of mentions of Old World *endroits*) appears to be the only continent which could meet all the conditions required, but there is almost what one might call a 'rhetoric of absence' in this failure to name what is becoming increasingly plain to the reader.

I propose to discuss this aspect of Carter's book further in later sections, but for the moment let us explore another aspect of Dr. Hoffman's 'War of Dreams' as waged against this unspecified 'city':

Abandoned lovers were often lured into the false embraces of faithless mistresses and this caused the Minister the gravest concern for he feared that one day a man might impregnate an illusion and then a generation of half-breed ghosts would befoul the city even more. But as I often felt I was a half-breed ghost myself, I did not feel much concerned over that!¹⁴

These ghosts and illusions which can ensnare former lovers remind one a little of the successive generations of ghosts in the Buendía family in Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. Indeed, even the long sprawling sentences which Carter indulges herself in here recall the poetic monologue of Melquíades the gipsy, who proves finally to be the narrator of the 'hundred years'. Of course, it is natural that an author seeking to make plausible such a war of illusions will gravitate towards the style most appropriate for her purposes - in this case, Latin American magic realism as practised by Asturias, Cortázar, Borges and García Márquez - but her dependence on them does not end there. Desiderio's revealing remark 'I often felt I was a half-breed ghost myself' alerts us to another intention in the passage.

¹⁴Carter, Hoffman, p.19.

The War of Dreams is, in effect, a war of interpretations - the monolithic world of the Minister held up against the almost oppressively 'free' polylogue of Dr. Hoffman and his illusions. A more important point, however, is how this parallels the earlier battle between the European founders of the city and the displaced indigenous inhabitants. Members of a race which has lost its hegemony of 'meaning-giving' - both through language and cosmology - may legitimately feel themselves to be 'ghosts', and a sexual union between the dominant and recessive groups in such a society is likely to lead to even more comprehensive deracination rather than to any harmony of exchanged attributes. Desiderio certainly fits these criteria:

My mother came from feckless, middle-European immigrant stock and her business, which was prostitution of the least exalted type, took her to the slums a good deal. I do not know who my father was but I carried his genetic imprint on my face, although my colleagues always contrived politely to ignore it since the white, pious nuns had vouched for me.¹⁵

One must make allowance for the characteristic orotundity of Carter's prose, but the way in which Desiderio refers to his mother's 'business' taking her 'to the slums a good deal' - the absurd parody of the business trips associated with a more respectable *métier* (like being a slum landlord) - seems to mask a certain bitterness at being just such a 'half-breed ghost'. The image he gives of himself in these opening pages is that of the *blasé roué*, devotee of the 'inhuman stylization of opera'¹⁶, but one can scarcely ignore the resentment in his reference to his colleagues' 'contriving politely to ignore' his racial origins. In any case, this is a theme which will recur later, among the 'river people' of the third chapter.

¹⁵Carter, *Hoffman*, p.16.

¹⁶Carter, *Hoffman*, p.16.

9.2.2 The Mansion of Midnight

At the beginning of the second chapter, Desiderio is sent by the Minister of Determination to investigate 'the activities of the proprietor of a certain peep-show who had operated his business upon the pier at the seaside resort of S. throughout the summer'¹⁷. 'It seemed a small enough clue to me', says Desiderio, and, indeed, some of the clues which we will be following in this chapter seem, in all conscience, small enough - but they do offer a fruitful sidelight on the intentions of Carter's novel.

Let us begin with her description of the peep-show itself:

It was ... the coloured replica of the canvas tent I had seen in monochrome in the files of the Bureau ... A yellowed play-bill in old-fashioned lettering announced that the SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD IN THREE LIFELIKE DIMENSIONS awaited one inside¹⁸.

Of the seven exhibits, only the first, 'I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE' need detain us long:

The legs of a woman, raised and open as if ready to admit a lover, formed a curvilinear triumphal arch ... The dark red and purple crenellations surrounding the vagina acted as a frame for a perfectly round hole through which the viewer glimpsed the moist, luxuriant landscape of the interior.

Here endlessly receded before one's eyes a miniature but irresistible vista of semi-tropical forest where amazing fruits hung on the trees ... Small, brilliant birds trilled silently on the branches; animals of exquisite shapes and colours, among them unicorns, giraffes and herbivorous lions, cropped up buttercups and daisies from the impossibly green grass ... As I watched, the pent-up force of the sweet juice within it burst open a persimmon and the split skin let out a flight of orange tawny singing birds ... A fish sprang out of the river, became a white rabbit and bounded away.¹⁹

The fantasy landscape spread out before us has elements of any idealized 'semi-tropical' landscape - though the white rabbit and the vegetarian lions

¹⁷Carter, Hoffman, p.39.

¹⁸Carter, Hoffman, p.42.

¹⁹Carter, Hoffman, p.44.

remind us, respectively, of literary gardens (Lewis Carroll's 'Alice' books, Behn's *Oroonoko*, *Le Roman de la Rose*), as well as the garden of Eden. Interestingly, however, this 'exhibit' also recalls the setting of one of Carter's short stories, 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest', in *Fireworks* (1974), which, like the novel, was written 'between 1970 and 1973'²⁰.

The story, a kind of malign parody of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1787), concerns Emile and Madeline, the two children of the French Naturalist Dubois. The narrative treats of their quest for 'the central node of the unvisited valley, the navel of the forest'²¹, which turns out to be another 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. The imagery associated with this forest - its rabbits twitching 'moist, velvet noses'²² and trees 'with trunks scaled like trout', whose fruit tasted of oysters²³, or which were 'knobbed with white, red-tipped whorls that looked so much like breasts they put their mouths to the nipples and sucked a sweet, refreshing milk'²⁴ - matches the vaginal vistas of 'I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE'. Even the 'herbivorous lions' in the peep-show can be equated with the description of Dubois as 'hirsute and gentle as a herbivorous lion'²⁵.

While it has not yet been possible to prove that Carter's novel is set in South America, 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest' certainly is - and the coincidence of imagery in the two stories offers us some further perspectives on Carter's strategies of representation. Note, for example, the prevalent Europeanism of this section of the narrative - towns are identified as 'the seaside resort of S.'²⁶, 'the University of P. ... the mountain resort of L.'²⁷ in the style of a Russian novel ('It was in the year 18-, in the town of N-, that I first became

²⁰Angela Carter, *Fireworks* (London, 1987), p.ii.

²¹Carter, *Fireworks*, p.53.

²²Carter, *Fireworks*, p.55.

²³Carter, *Fireworks*, p.58.

²⁴Carter, *Fireworks*, p.59.

²⁵Carter, *Fireworks*, p.49.

²⁶Carter, *Hoffman*, p.39.

²⁷Carter, *Hoffman*, p.27.

acquainted with the Countess von O-'). Even the local flora and fauna seem European - 'a family of young foxes'²⁸ gambol on the lawn outside the house in which Desiderio takes up residence, matching the 'fox cubs' who 'rolled in play'²⁹ around the feet of Dubois.

It is not so much that Carter is trying to persuade us that her narrative really is set in Europe - if this were the case, the Brazilian forest in *Fireworks* would have to be described differently from the 'seaside resort of S.' in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. It is more as if she matches her choice of the correct genre for a particular chapter or section with an appropriate background. The last, and perhaps most significant component of the scene in the peep-show is 'the misty battlements of a castle'.

The longer one looked at the dim outlines of this castle, the more sinister it grew, as though its granite viscera housed as many torture chambers as the Château of Silling.³⁰

The castle is formally identified as being that of Dr. Hoffman later in the novel³¹, but the trappings of German Romanticism which surround it - torture chambers, mist, battlements - should have already let us guess as much. Nor is the name 'Hoffman' the only link here with Gothic fiction - the 'Mansion of Midnight' in which Desiderio lodges comes straight out of Edgar Allan Poe - and 'Mary Anne', the young, wild-eyed girl he makes love to there, resembles the Ligeias and Morellas who abound in Poe's fiction.

Like a true Poe heroine, Mary Anne drowns herself after being deflowered (or is murdered, as Desiderio believes), and our hero is arrested by the Determination police on the following four counts:

- (1) obtaining carnal knowledge of a minor ...
- (2) procuring death by drowning of the said minor;

²⁸Carter, *Hoffman*, p.55.

²⁹Carter, *Fireworks*, p.51.

³⁰Carter, *Hoffman*, pp.44-45.

³¹Carter, *Hoffman*, p.196.

(3) practising necrophily on the corpse of the said minor ... and:

(4) posing as an Inspector of Veracity Class Three when I was really the fatherless son of a known prostitute of Indian extraction, an offence against the Determination Regulations ... viz.: 'Any thing or person seen to diverge significantly from it or his own known identity is committing an offence and may be apprehended and tested.'³²

The last (and most serious) charge sounds almost like a definition of the realist novel - 'staying in character', 'conforming to known laws', etc. - and it appears that Desiderio's is, in fact (like Dr. Hoffman's), an essentially generic offence.

The seven exhibits in the 'SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD' show consist, in order, of a vagina; a pair of eyes - the 'ETERNAL VISTAS OF LOVE'³³; a pair of breasts served like ice-cream (like the tree in the story); the mutilated torso of a woman; the same woman's severed head - with 'a hideous expression of resignation'³⁴; a penis - 'I was struck with the notion that this was supposed to represent the Minister's penis'³⁵; and a couple engaged in the 'perpetual motion' of copulation. This malign view of sexuality as machinery, mutilation, commodity and death is Hoffman's diagnosis of the repressed patriarchal world of the Minister and the city, but the Doctor's own alternative order seems to consist merely of the perpetual revelation of this 'truth' of love-as-death. It seems, then, that Carter is attempting in this section to suggest an identification of Gothic and Romantic artifice with the perversions of eroticism which they are attempting to suppress (Desiderio's later examination of the peep-show reveals a series of tableaux giving a malign fairy-tale version of his seduction of Mary Anne, much in the manner of Carter's later book *The Bloody Chamber* (1979)). But whether this is her own analysis, or that of Hoffman or one of the other characters is not, as yet, entirely clear.

To return to our central thread, though, the location of Carter's novel is

³²Carter, Hoffman, p.62.

³³Carter, Hoffman, p.45.

³⁴Carter, Hoffman, p.46.

³⁵Carter, Hoffman, p.46.

becoming more certain as her actual landscapes become more eclectic - including, here, European houses and animals as an adjunct to 'European' literary forms such as the Gothic novel. Another clue to her strategy is given in the passage where Desiderio describes:

A child with crinkled hair tied up in the innumerable pigtails the poor and superstitious adopt for, I think, reasons of voodoo ... she answered me incomprehensibly in the multi-lingual patois of the slums³⁶.

These 'reasons of voodoo' are, of course, West Indian or Caribbean - and recall the 'dark, voodoo folklore'³⁷ of 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest'. Desiderio's insistence on describing the New World in terms of the Old is weakening as he comes to feel 'a degree of ambivalence towards the Minister's architectonic vision of the perfect state. This was because I was aware of what would have been my own position in that watertight schema'³⁸. The little (black?) girl is beginning to offer a more attractive prospect - though she is still incomprehensible because of her 'voodoo' and her 'patois' (both importations from the Old World - a reversal of expectations worthy of Aphra Behn).

³⁶Carter, Hoffman, p.60.

³⁷Carter, Fireworks, p.48.

³⁸Carter, Hoffman, p.60.

9.2.3 The River People

In the first two sections of this analysis it has been possible to make some interesting equations between the concerns of Carter's novel and those of this study as a whole. The 'multi-cultural' identity of the 'City under Siege' can be seen to be analogous with the mythological clichés characteristic of European perceptions of South America - a misleading specificity of detail which masks an actual interchangeability of 'alien' personnel. The 'Mansion of Midnight', on the other hand, employs the trappings of Gothic Romanticism in order to uncover some of the contradictions and suppressed motivations within it - in a way not dissimilar to *Oroonoko's* use of the conventions of 'New World' description to paint the Dystopia of the slave-state Surinam. So precise a fit cannot be hoped for throughout (would, in fact, be somewhat suspicious), but - while the chapter numbers may not match - the similarity between the two projects continues to be striking.

She begins her third chapter in the following manner:

The Portuguese did us the honour of discovering us towards the middle of the sixteenth century ... they ... found a tenuous coastline of fever-sodden swamp which, as they reluctantly penetrated inland, they found solidified to form a great expanse of sun-baked prairie. Lavishly distributing the white spirochete and the word of God as they went, they travelled far enough to glimpse the hostile ramparts of the mountains before they turned back for there was no gold or silver to be had, only malaria and yellow fever. So they left it to the industrious Dutch a century later to drain the marshes and set up that intricate system of canals, later completed and extended during a brief visit by the British, to which the country was to owe so much of its later wealth.³⁹

Having sufficiently problematicized any possible solution to the question of 'setting' to make it no loss for her to reveal where her story is taking place, Carter at last offers us the decisive information. Pausing to note the collocation of 'swamp', 'prairie' and 'hostile mountains' - our three paradigmatic South American landscapes of Amazon, Pampa and Andes - as well as the characteristically European quest for 'gold and silver', let us ask ourselves what countries were 1/ discovered by the Portuguese in the 'middle of the sixteenth

³⁹Carter, *Hoffman*, p.67.

century'; 2/ taken over by the Dutch, who then alternated for dominance with the English; and 3/ had a capital 'founded in the early eighteenth century'⁴⁰?

Number 1 seems to fit Brazil best, both because of the date and because of the remark that 'our nation began as an afterthought, or a footnote to other, more magnificent conquests'⁴¹ - presumably, those in Africa, India and the East Indies commemorated by Camões in the *Lusiads* (1572). Number 2 would lead us to think of the Guianan territories - Dutch Surinam and British Guiana - a little further north. Number 3, along with the mention of how 'a brief but bloody slave revolt put a stop to slavery at the time of the French Revolution'⁴², recalls Cuba or Haiti, but the veiled reference to the Southern States of the U.S.A. in the comment 'enough black slaves ran away from the plantations of the northern continent to provide cheap labour in the factories, shipyards and open-cast mines' puts the hemisphere at least beyond doubt.

Or rather, not absolutely beyond doubt, as Carter still persists in suppressing the word 'America' - especially in the form, 'South America', which is most commonly employed for the continent she is describing. She gets tantalizingly closer and closer to it in the pages that follow: 'They were no Aztecs or Incas but brown, naïve men and women'⁴³, she says of the indigenous tribes whom the Jesuits, 'those indefatigable storm-troopers of the Lord', tried in vain to convert. 'But those defunct Amerindians had possessed a singular charm'⁴⁴. This is the crucial statement - the one from which she cannot go back. We are in South America. The city is situated in the top half of that continent, with mountains to the north of it (like Venezuela or Guiana), and an Atlantic coast (as we will see when Desiderio sets sail for Africa with his travelling companion the Count). The successive layers of Portuguese, Dutch and English occupancy make it tempting to identify it with the Surinam of Aphra Behn - at any rate as a kind of rough

⁴⁰Carter, *Hoffman*, p.67: 'Here they built a house for Jesus, a bank, a prison, a stock exchange, a madhouse, a suburb and a slum. It was complete. It prospered.'

⁴¹Carter, *Hoffman*, p.67.

⁴²Carter, *Hoffman*, p.67.

⁴³Carter, *Hoffman*, p.68.

⁴⁴Carter, *Hoffman*, p.69.

'mirror', just as Colombia serves as a template for Conrad's Costaguana (at least in geographical position).

The word 'Amerindian' may leave us with no doubts, but it is still curious that it should have been delayed so long, surrounded with so much mystification (a mystification accompanied by almost obsessive detailing of physical features of landscape and people), and that the formula 'South America' has still not been used. I spoke earlier of a 'rhetoric of absence' - a kind of accent placed on the one, almost inevitable word or phrase associated with a particular situation which is not said - but a further reason for Carter's choice of South America as the setting for her metaphysical war of dreams is hinted at in Desiderio's remark:

if we had not existed, Dr. Hoffman could not have invented a better country in which to perform his experiments ... were we not - except myself - almost all of us expatriates?⁴⁵

For 'Hoffman', read 'Carter'. South America offers all the facilities for her deracinated, post-modern narrative style. It is both part of the colonized world and, because of the antiquity of its conquest, one of the colonizers - it is both Europeanized and ambivalently 'native'. It contains representatives of all races, and yet is not (unlike, say, China or India) still dominated by its indigenous inhabitants. Unlike more recent countries where Europeans have displaced the native races (Australia, New Zealand), the dominant culture in Latin America is neither Iberian nor Indian but something new, something in the process of becoming. Something, what is more, which is perpetually renewed in the Old World's need for an alternative, a mirror for its own entrenched ways.

The 'river people' themselves, the Indian tribe which Desiderio takes up with after his escape from the Determination police, offer another example of this employment of South America as a kind of 'control culture' - one which, by including all peoples and customs, is left with none of its own. The girl Aoi, who is offered to Desiderio in marriage, wears the elaborate make-up of a Japanese doll: 'it was the custom for all the women to stain their teeth black'⁴⁶; they also

⁴⁵Carter, Hoffman, p.68.

⁴⁶Carter, Hoffman, p.71.

painted their faces so that 'A coat of matt white covered [their] nose, cheeks and forehead but left [their] necks and ears as brown as nature made them', while 'On top of this white crust [they] put a spherical scarlet dot in the middle of each cheek'⁴⁷. Their mouths are painted with a red heart which 'completely ignored the real contours of the lips', and 'The eyebrows were painted out and painted in again some three inches above the natural position, giving ... an habitual look of extreme surprise'⁴⁸. Some of these details - the brown faces, or the red dots on the cheeks - might be matched by the customary regalia of certain Amazon tribes. The white, mask-like make-up, the false eyebrows and the blackened teeth are, however, all familiar features of Japanese high fashion in the Heian era (c.900-1100 A.D.), during which Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*, one of whose heroines is also called 'Aoi', was composed.

This 'Japanese' iconography might be accidental if it were not for the fact that it matched the themes of the chapter so closely. Aoi, who is still a little girl, carries a doll which turns out to be a 'large fish dressed up in baby clothes':

Whenever the fish began to rot, Mama exchanged it for a fresh one just like it so that, though the doll was always changing, it always stayed exactly the same.⁴⁹

This last remark becomes significant when Desiderio begins to suspect that the real 'consummation' of the elaborate courtship rituals he is being led through by Aoi and her grandmother is his own death. He finds that a large kitchen knife has replaced the dressed-up fish.

Carter seems, then, to be using national features as a kind of extended metaphor. Just as the imagery of German Romanticism assisted her in the last chapter to make a series of points about the elaborate death-in-love at the root of nineteenth-century Gothic; in this one Carter wishes to show a class of women outwardly conforming to all the characteristics of a 'living doll', but in fact concealing murderous aggression within. Another one of the stories in *Fireworks*

⁴⁷Carter, *Hoffman*, p.71.

⁴⁸Carter, *Hoffman*, p.72.

⁴⁹Carter, *Hoffman*, pp.75-76.

becomes significant in this context - 'The Loves of Lady Purple' - one of the several on Japanese themes written after her visit there in the early seventies.

In this story, a doll which has been used as the repository for the sadistic fantasies of its creator, the 'Asiatic Professor',⁵⁰, finally comes to life and murders its Pygmalion. In a similar way, the river-women, slaves to a rigid kinship structure, are programmed both to make love to and (in cases determined by the tribe), murder strangers. Desiderio feels unable to blame them as he once again makes his escape - they assumed that by eating him they would gain his knowledge of reading and writing - but it convinces him that his desire to become, once again, an 'Indian' is impossible. Is it that the river-dwellers are seen by him as Japanese, and are therefore presented as such in his narrative - or that Carter herself means to imply that there is no road back from the colonial impasse, the appropriation of meaning by an alien culture? In either case, Desiderio finds himself forced to resume his deracinated progress through the successive genres and peoples of this textualized 'South America'.

⁵⁰Carter, Fireworks, p.23.

9.2.4 The Acrobats of Desire

It would be neither practical nor desirable to continue our discussion of Carter's novel on this scale. I therefore propose, in our examination of the remaining five chapters, to highlight only a few themes in each, reserving a more comprehensive analysis for the conclusion.

This town was full of malevolent saints. Shut in on themselves in their isolation, they were an inbred mixture of Carpathian Poles and mountain French whose forefathers had fled to Europe in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries due to persecutions of the scrupulous sects of the reformed religion to which they belonged.⁵¹

After his traumatic escape from the river people, with whom he had hoped to stay forever, Desiderio returns to the travelling carnival and becomes assistant to the old man in charge of the peep-show containing Dr. Hoffman's 'set of samples'.⁵² These (including the pictures that Desiderio saw before) are the 'symbolic constituents of representations of the basic constituents of the universe. If they are properly arranged, all the possible situations in the world and every possible mutation of those situations can be represented'.⁵³

In other words, then, the peep-show might be seen as a kind of 'Memory-theatre', like those discussed in Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory* (1966), which enables its controller, or 'Magus', to order and thus contain and control the structure of the universe. This cabbalistic vision is summed up in the following terms:

everything it is possible to imagine can also exist. A vast encyclopedia of mythological references supported this initial hypothesis - shamans of Oceania ... poets of medieval Ireland ... Hoffman had moved well out of the realm of pure science and resurrected all manner of antique pseudo-sciences, alchemy, geomancy ... the ancient Chinese ... elemental aspects of maleness and femaleness.⁵⁴

⁵¹Carter, *Hoffman*, p.114.

⁵²Carter, *Hoffman*, p.95.

⁵³Carter, *Hoffman*, pp.95-96.

⁵⁴Carter, *Hoffman*, p.97.

All that is needed for the display of such a plethora of different powers is a central, neutral ground; and thus it is that we notice in this list that Oceania, Europe (in the form of ancient Ireland), Asia (in the form of ancient China), even (a little further down) the Marquis de Sade are all invoked, but there is no mention made of any aspect of America - despite its obvious associations with shamanism.

The travelling fair itself, personification of the chaos of carnival, is also a 'microcosm with as gaudy, circumscribed, rotary and absurd a structure as a roundabout'⁵⁵:

Mexican comedians; intrepid equestriennes from Nebraska, Kansas or Ohio whose endless legs and scrubbed features were labelled 'Made in U.S.A.'; Japanese dwarfs ...; Norwegian motor-cyclists ... dancing albinos ... the bearded lady and the alligator man⁵⁶.

Mexico and the United States at last rate a mention, but only in the catalogue of freaks - South Americans remaining obstinately absent ('Natives of the fairground, they acknowledged no other nationality'⁵⁷).

It is in this context that the quotation at the beginning of this section acquires interest. There is a misprint in it. It should be 'whose forefathers had fled from Europe [to South America]', instead of 'fled to Europe', but the fact that the mistake could be made at all is not without a certain interest. Carter's South America is, after all, so obstinately un-South American. It is not, therefore, surprising that a proofreader should miss so subtle an error - after all, the Carpathians, the mountain French, these are all aspects of Europe.

I highlight this insignificant error because it allows us to see how far the purposes of Dr. Hoffman at this point resemble those of his creator, Angela Carter. Like him, she is assembling the 'symbolic constituents' of her culture in the form of a picaresque novel (significantly, when the leader of the river people decides to try and learn to read from Desiderio, 'he sent one of his sons off to buy

⁵⁵Carter, Hoffman, p.99.

⁵⁶Carter, Hoffman, p.98.

⁵⁷Carter, Hoffman, p.98.

... any book he could find, which happened to be a translation of *Gulliver's Travels*,⁵⁸ - Carter's narrative, too, could be said to be a 'translation' of Swift's satire on the follies and knaveries of mankind). Just as Hoffman, the Magus at the centre of his Memory Theatre, must situate himself in neutral space - his castle in the womb, 'I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE' - so Carter places her narrative in a New World that is so much a mirror for the Old that it has no character of its own. Carnival, the world upside down, is at the centre of both their enterprises - and the 'Minister of Determination' places the same necessary but unwelcome brake on both. Hoffman's world dissolves into anarchy when his 'set of samples' is lost in an earthquake - and the brutal oppression needed to return it to any semblance of form results in the loss of the fruitful fantasies he has collected. Carter's novel, too, can convey its simultaneous love and suspicion of chaos only through the rigidities of the conventional novelistic structure she has chosen - and her failure to bring about a happy consummation seems as much a result of the constraints of form as an expression of ideology.

The metaphor for this in the context of this chapter is the performance of the nine Moroccan acrobats, who 'limb by limb ... dismembered themselves' until 'The severed heads and arms and feet and navels began to juggle with eighteen fringed, unblinking eyes'⁵⁹. In a novel, anything is possible which can be expressed in words - but that does not mean that anything is desirable. The wonderful (and impossible) act of these acrobats is by no means morally neutral - like the free-ranging illusions of Dr. Hoffman, their control of their own bodies encourages them to experiment with Desiderio's, so that:

in this holy city, I was fucked in the anus, against my will (as far, that is, as I was conscious of my desires), by all nine of the Moroccan acrobats, one after the other.⁶⁰

This sexual cataclysm, it is implied, may be responsible for the earthquake which swallows up the entire travelling fair (with the exception of Desiderio), and destroys Hoffman's control over his own creations.

⁵⁸Carter, *Hoffman*, pp.74-75.

⁵⁹Carter, *Hoffman*, pp.113-14.

⁶⁰Carter, *Hoffman*, p.115.

The structure of this chapter, then, is expressed in a series of ordering devices which in fact promote chaos. The 'symbolic constituents ... of the universe' in the peep-show are mirrored by the 'microcosm' of the travelling fair (echoes in the world of the novel of the use to which Carter herself is putting 'South America'). The gang-rape of Desiderio by the 'Acrobats of Desire' is simply an acknowledgement of the fact that so rigid a structure cannot be extended to contain its opposites and antitheses - that no balance can be achieved between the 'Determinism' of the Minister's city and the absolute freedom (freedom even to self-destruct) of Hoffman's universe.

9.2.5 The Erotic Traveller

With Hoffman's control over his own creations broken, Carter's novel, too, begins to come loose from its own self-definition in terms of setting and era. The first expression of this state of flux comes with the advent of the Count, an amalgam of Gilles de Retz, Cagliostro, the Marquis de Sade, and Casanova. His account of his travels confirms his status as 'some kind of ontological freelance'⁶¹ who thrives on the imbalance between the two armed camps of the Minister and Dr. Hoffman:

I witnessed the eruption of Vesuvius when thousands were confined alive in molten lava. I saw eyes burst and fat run out of roast crackling in Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Dresden. I dabbled my fingers in the blood beneath the guillotine during the Terror.⁶²

His freedom to range through Roman antiquity, the eighteenth century, and up to World War Two is presumably the result of the existential anarchy unleashed by the destruction of Dr. Hoffman's samples in the earthquake - but it is significant that the only link between these eras is the different types of cruelty and suffering they contain. The Count, who also seems to have something of Count Dracula in him, demands to be serviced in the whorehouse they visit by a girl who 'must have come straight from the whipping parlour for her back was a ravelled palimpsest of wound upon wound - she was neither animal nor vegetable nor technological; this torn and bleeding she was the most dramatic revelation of the nature of meat that I have ever seen'⁶³. After the Count's attentions she is left 'only a bleeding moan'⁶⁴. The house, fittingly enough, is called the 'House of Anonymity' - symbolizing, one presumes, the power of sexuality in its most impersonal form.

Once again, South America is the one place not mentioned by name in the Count's account of his own peregrinations:

⁶¹Carter, *Hoffman*, pp.144-45.

⁶²Carter, *Hoffman*, pp.122-23.

⁶³Carter, *Hoffman*, p.133.

⁶⁴Carter, *Hoffman*, p.137.

When I first left my native Lithuania, I went at once to China ... [then] the rest of Asia ... the exquisitely bell-haunted city of Kyoto ... Siam ... Europe ... condemned to burn at the stake in Spain, to hang by the neck in England and to break upon the wheel in a singularly inhospitable France ... I fled to North America, where I knew my barbarities would pass unnoticed ... Quebec ... Salem, Mass. ... Alabama ... New Orleans⁶⁵.

There, however, he meets his nemesis. 'In a perfumed bordello in New Orleans I strangled with my legs a mulatto whore ... But after that, I became the object of the vengeance of her enraged pimp, a black of more than superhuman inhumanity, in whom I sense a twin', and who has pursued him

over the neck of the continent, through deserts ... jungles ... and then across those rearing mountains ... than which, even in the steppes of Central Asia, I have seen nothing more arid or inimical.⁶⁶

The Count is not so much a character as an expression of desire - or, at any rate, of the rationalized cruelty and perversity known as Sadism. His effect on the narrative is to reduce it to its barest essentials - the chronological confusion here being matched by wholesale geographical relativity in the next chapter.

⁶⁵Carter, Hoffman, pp.126-27.

⁶⁶Carter, Hoffman, p.127.

9.2.6 The Coast of Africa

The Count persuaded Desiderio, at the end of the previous chapter, that:

I must go with him to Europe, to another continent, to another hemisphere, where everything would be new because it was so old and there was no war, no Dr Hoffman, no Minister, no quest, no Albertina - nothing familiar except myself.⁶⁷

This is perhaps the nicest twist yet in Carter's subversion of the conventional 'New World' narrative - the Old World is defined precisely as the absence of those qualities it has supplied to the New.

I had not the least idea what time or place the Count might take me to though, since his modes of travel were horseback, gig and tall-masted schooner, I guessed, wherever it was, it would be somewhere in the early nineteenth century.⁶⁸

So powerful is the ontological effect of the Count's solipsism, that he is able to impose his own view of their surroundings on his companions - even to the extent, when he conjures up a group of blood-crazed pirates, of endangering his own life. Vestiges of another reality keep on breaking through, however. Desiderio and the Count's servant Lafleur (actually Albertina in disguise) notice 'one or two teasing anachronisms'⁶⁹ - a wind-up gramophone, a radio - on board the schooner, but the Count's vision again prevails when they are shipwrecked on the coast of Africa:

I was not at all sure to which continent the ground belonged. I thought it must be my own far American South but the Count opted hopefully for savage Africa while Lafleur observed remotely that we had not the least notion where we really were but had probably been blown willy-nilly on to the coast of some distant island. When we went down to the beach to wash ourselves, we soon saw the inhabitants were black and so felt certain we were in Africa.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Carter, Hoffman, p.141.

⁶⁸Carter, Hoffman, p.143.

⁶⁹Carter, Hoffman, p.144.

⁷⁰Carter, Hoffman, p.155.

Again, there is a battle of genres among our three protagonists. 'Lafleur' (Albertina) plumps for a Robinsonade on a desert island; Desiderio prefers a Ulysses-like return to his 'own far American South' - note, still not 'South America' itself - while the Count would prefer a reversion to savagery on the one continent, by his own account, which he has not yet visited and named.

In these regions, you may observe man in his constitutionally vicious, instinctively evil and studiously ferocious form - in a word, in the closest possible harmony with the natural world.⁷¹

With both place and time uncertain, thanks to the loss of Hoffman's samples, the Count is forced to take refuge in the certainties of his own imagination. The imagery of his 'Africa' might have come straight from Montaigne's essay 'Des Cannibales', about Brazil. The malleable nature of this stereotypical 'savage' landscape is stressed in the descriptive details that follow - 'a jaunty detachment of Amazons' (p.156) form the Chief's bodyguard; they march through 'vaulted architraves of the palms ... emerald feathers which formed the capitals of this vegetable cathedral' (p.157) - a reference to Hudson's *Green Mansions?*; 'The chief' wears, impossibly, 'the pelt of a tiger' (p.159), while 'His appalling face suggested more than Aztec horrors' (p.159). Finally, he informs them, 'those delightful children who seem, each one, to have stepped straight off the pen of Jean-Jacques Rousseau ... [dine] daily off a grilled rump, or roasted shoulder, a stew, a fricassée, or else a hash of human meat ... since this diet is certain to triple the libidinal capacities, as my wives and concubines can willingly testify'⁷². The Count, deciding that this 'chief' is none other than his old enemy, the black pimp, resigns himself to dying in a cooking pot. Freed finally from his destructive imagination, Albertina and Desiderio are able narrowly to escape the same fate.

⁷¹Carter, Hoffman, p.161.

⁷²Carter, Hoffman, p.159.

9.2.7 Lost in Nebulous Time

Wandering in the shadowy regions of possibility opened up by the Count's death and her father's loss of complete control over nature, Albertina and Desiderio come upon a race of centaurs, living lives of classic ease and simplicity, who take them in as slaves. Having examined in successive chapters the motivating forces behind European Romanticism ('The Mansion of Midnight'), anthropophagous native cultures ('The River People', Carnival ('The Acrobats of Desire'), Sadistic Picaresque ('The Erotic Traveller'), and Rousseau-esque 'savagery' ('The Coast of Africa'), Carter is now prepared to re-imagine the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Lest the allusion to Swift should be lost on us, she adds:

when I tried to tell the bay that by far the greater number of social institutions in the world were made by weak, two-legged, thin-skinned creatures much the same as Albertina and I, he told me in so many words that I was lying. For, because they were men, they had many words to describe conditions of deceit; they were not Houyhnhnms.⁷³

Certainly one's sense of disquiet at the 'ideal' lives of Swift's Houyhnhnms is given ammunition here. All the males in the herd rape Albertina on her first arriving in their midst.

And though Albertina was the object of a rape, the males clearly did not know it was a rape. They showed neither enthusiasm nor gratification. It was only some form of ritual, another invocation of the Sacred Horse.⁷⁴

Another ritual of the same kind is their yahoo-like emptying of the bowels on any ceremonial or religious occasion. Their theologians, still with the same simple logic and lack of affect, decide to torture their two guests to death by tattooing them, then nailing horseshoes to their feet and leaving them to be trampled to death by the wild horses. Only the sudden advent of one of Dr. Hoffman's reconnaissance squads saves them from this fate, though the centaurs' civilization is swallowed up in the fire-storm that ensues.

⁷³Carter, *Hoffman*, p.187.

⁷⁴Carter, *Hoffman*, p.180.

9.2.8 The Castle

The quasi-fascism of these Swiftian monads is succeeded by Desiderio's final penetration of the castle of Dr. Hoffman himself. We have, however, 'been here before' - and it is difficult to keep up the tension as we approach this most preordained of conclusions.

Our analysis of the implications of the name 'Hoffman' is confirmed by the statement that his study

was half Rottwang's laboratory in Lang's *Metropolis* but it was also the cabinet of Dr. Caligari⁷⁵.

- Two of the most potent images of German Expressionist cinema, heir to the Gothic impulse.

The Doctor also confirms the reasons for his choice of South America as a base:

I used the capital city of this country as the testing ground for my first experiments because the unstable existential structure of its institutions could not suppress the latent consciousness as effectively as a structure with a firmer societal organization. I should have had very little success in, for example, Peking⁷⁶.

(If this is also Carter's reasoning concerning her choice of South America, it would imply an interesting distinction between Barthes' *sinité* - his clichés associated with China - and the elusive and oblique readings of 'South America' which have been explored in this study).

Finally, we come to Desiderio's inevitable break with Albertina, when he refuses to convert their 'eroto-energy' into the force required to power the Doctor's unreality dynamos. As they grapple over the corpse of her father, 'I savaged her throat with my teeth as if I were a tiger and she were the trophy I seized in the forests of the night'⁷⁷. The uneasy prophecy of the peep-show's severed female head - 'TROPHY OF A HUNTER IN THE FORESTS OF THE

⁷⁵Carter, *Hoffman*, p.204.

⁷⁶Carter, *Hoffman*, p.211.

⁷⁷Carter, *Hoffman*, p.216.

NIGHT'⁷⁸ - is at last confirmed.

The sources of Hoffman's power are absent in the new city which grows up after his downfall.

The golden bowl is not broken in this city. It is round as a cake and everyone may have a slice of it, according to his need. A need is nothing like a desire.⁷⁹

'Desire', then - the forces associated with the chaos and fantasy of Dr. Hoffman - is defeated by 'need' (personified by the Minister of Determination). In Carter's novel, though, the two remain in tension - the struggle between rigid (if picaresque) form and fantastic content cannot be resolved in favour of one or the other. Albertina, significantly, continues to visit Desiderio in his dreams.

⁷⁸Carter, Hoffman, p.46.

⁷⁹Carter, Hoffman, p.207.

9.3 Conclusion

We have charted the literary uses of the concept of 'South America' in a number of ways in the course of this study - from the straightforwardly Edenic 'New World' readings of the first discoverers, to the subtler fictions of writers like Behn, Hudson, Masfield and Conrad, and finally the subversive strategies of Elizabeth Bishop and Angela Carter, who see in South America a mirror for their own deracination both as women (in a patriarchal society), and writers (whose tools of discourse come to them ideologically 'ready-made'). This reversal of traditional views may be apparent only by implication (signalled by elements which have not been repeated) in Bishop's poems and translations, but it can be demonstrated in detail in writers like Carter and Kathy Acker (whose *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978) is set partly in Yucatán, Mexico). This last strand seems to me, if not the most interesting, at any rate the most sustainable of these stances in view of the plethora of 'native voices' which can now, in the second half of the twentieth century, lay claim to providing a literary model for their own continent.

Both Carter and Acker (in *Kathy Goes to Haiti* (1978)) have seized upon South America's reputation for carnivalesque inversion and eroticism to provide a complementary critique of Western (generic) norms of love and sexuality. In Acker's books, sex is shown as an irretrievably tainted act in a culture dominated by death. She describes the Mayan ruins explored by her heroine 'Janey' in the following terms:

Monumental ruins.

... buildings, vast and fearsome. Thousands of endlessly wide steps on all sides lead up to a tiny room, eagles and rattlesnakes, outside, inside? Inside this structure, steps, narrow, steep and wet, deep within the structure a small jaguar whose teeth are bright white, mounted by a reclining man. The outer steps are so tiny, the burning white sun endlessly high. The climb. It is easy to fall.

All of the other structures are the same way. Heavily ornamented and constructed so beyond human scale they cause fear. Ball parks that cause fear. What for? Why does Rockefeller need more money so badly he kills the life in the waters around Puerto Rico? Why does one person follow his/her whims to the detriment (deep suffering) of someone that person supposedly loves?

... Don't say it out loud. The long wall of skulls next to the ball park repeats the death.⁸⁰

The tainted quality of the writing she has inherited is satirized by her broken, fragmentary sentences, followed by the clichéd speech of the professional counsellor, 'his/her whims to the detriment (deep suffering) of someone that person supposedly loves'. So deeply infected is this language that Janey is forced to resort to literal cribs of Sextus Propertius' Latin when she attempts to compose a series of love poems to her pimp, the Persian slave trader, whom she loves 'because she had nothing else to feel':

Slave Trader first with his lousy me imprisoned eyes
diseased by no before wants.
Then my strong he threw down the drain individuality
and head forced into the dust LOVE'S feet⁸¹.

Though, perversely, this process ends by yielding a sort of pared-down eloquence:

You hear can the raging of oceans under bridges,
brave? on hard cold floor how to sleep you can know?
you, delicate and scared, survive chills and frosts
you can, not used to the slightest snow?
Let winter's be double the length of solstice
let be dead 'cause of late the sailors Pleiades
let no your from the Tyrrhenian be freed ropes muck
let not unfriendly my throw away winds pleas!⁸²

Seeking to destroy conventional rhetoric, Acker succeeds in resurrecting an earlier diction - the speech rhythms of the Anglo-Saxon 'Seafarer'.

The similarity to Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* is at once apparent. This novel, essentially, is devoted to dramatizing the links between love and death in Western tradition. In chapter 1, Carter has Hoffman's illusions mating with their abandoned lovers; in chapter 2, the 'liebestod' of the Poe-like Mary Anne, who kills herself or is murdered as a direct result of sleep-walking into the arms of Desiderio; in chapter 3, the river people conflate the marriage of their daughter with a cannibal feast on the remains of the

⁸⁰Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School, plus two* (London, 1984), pp.16-17.

⁸¹Acker, p.101.

⁸²Acker, p.105.

bridegroom; in chapter 4, an earthquake is triggered by the homosexual rape of Desiderio; in chapter 5, the Count will only make love to what is, in effect, a piece of 'meat'; in chapter 6, members of the African chief's harem lie beneath the wheels of his rolling throne to be mutilated; in chapter 7, the centaurs rape Albertina as a ritual gesture, and decide to consecrate both bipeds to the service of their god by torturing them to death; while finally, in chapter 8, Desiderio is offered a choice between a death-in-life of perpetual love-making to power the Doctor's generators, or the death of his beloved. He chooses the latter.

Carter's employment of 'South America' seems unusual among the authors we have been studying because of her reluctance to name the continent in which her characters reside. This lack of specificity has had the effect, however, as we have seen, of freeing her narrative from the constraints of realist convention and subordinating it solely to the laws of genre. Like Acker, then, she might be seen to be acting more in the service of language itself than as an ideological contestant in the Western 'ball park' of games with love and death.

When, at the beginning of this thesis, I made it clear that this was to be a theoretical exploration of the ways in which the necessity of evoking 'alien-ness' in fiction can be based on the mythological clichés linked to particular regions by the popular imagination, I found it necessary to reject a number of perhaps more obvious approaches to such an inquiry. Catalogues of themes and readings associated with South America certainly still remain to be compiled, but my stress has had to be laid instead on conventions of genre (fiction and non-fiction, history and travel-writing), chronology (methodological distinctions between diachronic and synchronic accounts of the same phenomena), and setting ('real' and 'imaginary' countries - epistemological and ontological worlds).

Carter's, then, far from being a reading of 'South America' anomalous to other parts of the European tradition, can be seen almost as their logical conclusion. Her dependence on genre to dictate the details of both setting and chronology (Desiderio 'guesses' that he will end up in the early nineteenth century, because the Count's 'modes of travel were horseback, gig and tall-masted schooner'; the 'Japanese' and 'Gothic' trimmings of her second and third chapters are dictated by the types of action being described, rather than by any South

American 'local colour'), illustrate perfectly the distinction between the geographical and imaginary 'South Americas' which I have been attempting to make throughout.

In short, the answer to the conundrum first posed in my preface is that South America can be distinguished from the 'South America' of particular works of the imagination insofar as only the precise letter of their texts can be a sufficient exposition of the complexity of their relation to that setting. Following on from this point, the distinction between the 'South America', 'Africa', 'South-East Asia' and 'Polynesia' of the European mind is again illustrated by Carter's novel. *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* contains, as I have been careful to point out in my account of it, no specifically 'South American' features. True, she mentions 'Indians', the 'Old and New World', the paraphernalia of Carnival, but any one of these might be taken just as easily to refer to one of the other regions listed above. Its 'South American-ness', then, depends on the emphasis Carter lays throughout on the arbitrariness of such indicators of place. She includes aspects of Europe, of Africa (indeed, the 'Africa' conjured up by the Count's imagination contains more 'South American' elements than any of the scenes set in Desiderio's 'own far American South') - even of Japan - in the effort to establish the textual quality of this 'place'. Carter's 'South America' is nowhere except on paper - nowhere except in the words with which it is evoked - and the only way in which she can signal this is to leave out those two words altogether.

The Latin American writer's relationship to 'Latin America' is a complex one, compounded of national and regional allegiances, and a substratum of literary tropes and conventions coming to him or her from the past. This I have tried to acknowledge in my diagrammatic representation of these influences in Section 1 of this chapter. The European (or 'Western' - one feels that North America and even Australasia should be included under this heading) writer's relationship to 'South America' is both simpler and more paradoxical. It is paper-thin. What all of the mythologizers and fictionalizers of 'South America' have in common is that their version of it is as comprehensive or subversive as the laws of genre and the dictates of individual talent allow. The 'elusiveness' of identity promised in my title consists in the fact that it can never be extracted from the body of textuality itself - an ontology that consists simply of naming a New World.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1:

A Select List of Imaginary Countries in South America

A - author's name

B - work, date and place of publication

C - name of country

D - approximate location

A	B	C	D
Christine Bell	Saint (U.S.A., 1985)	'Santa del Rio'	Jungle - interior
John Buchan	The Courts of the Morning (London, 1929)	'Olifa' -	Pacific coast (maps included)
Angela Carter	The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (London, 1972)	Unnamed -	Guiana/ Northern Brazil -
Joseph Conrad	Nostromo - (London, 1904)	'Costaguana'	Pacific coast
Stephen Dobyns	The Two Deaths of Señora Puccini (New York, 1988)	Unnamed -	North -
Thomas Gilby	Up the Green River (London, 1955)	'Liberadoria' and 'New Algarves'	Interior -
Lois Gould	La Presidenta (London, 1982)	'Pradera' -	South -
O. Henry -	Cabbages and Kings (New York, 1904)	'Anchuria'	North -
R. C. - Hutchinson	Rising - (London, 1976)	Unnamed	Andean - Republic
R. C. - Hutchinson	'Anniversary', in The Quixotes: Collected Stories (Manchester, 1984)	Unnamed -	Central - America
John Masefield	Sard Harker (London, 1924)	'Santa Barbara' -	Caribbean - 'sugar coast'
John Masefield	Odtaa (London, 1926)	'Santa Barbara' -	(maps included)
John Masefield	The Midnight Folk (London, 1927)	'Santa Barbara' -	- - -
John Masefield	The Taking of the Gry (London, 1934)	'Santa Barbara' -	- - -
Shiva Naipaul	A Hot Country (London, 1983)	'Cuyama' -	Guiana -
Richard Powell	Don Quixote U.S.A. (New York, 1966)	'San Marco'*	Central - America

* Also included in Woody Allen's film 'Bananas' (1971), as 'San Marcos'.

A	B	C	D
Herbert Read	The Green - Child (London, 1935)	'Roncador'	Interior -
Lucius Shepard	The Jaguar Hunter (New York, 1987)	'Puerto - Morada'	Central - America
Kurt Vonnegut	Cat's Cradle (New York, 1963)	'San Lorenzo'	Caribbean - island
Virginia Woolf	The Voyage Out (London, 1915)	'Santa - Marina'	Atlantic - Coast

APPENDIX 2:

A Select List of English Fictions about South America

A - author's name

B - work, date and place of publication

C - area portrayed

A	B	C
Vernon F. Anderson	Sudden Glory - (London, 1987)	Guatemala -
R. M. Ballantyne	Martin Rattler - (London, 1858)	Brazil -
R. M. Ballantyne	Lost in the Forest (London, 1888)	Peru - -
Aphra Behn -	Oroonoko (London, 1688)	Guiana -
Michael Bentine	The Condor and the Cross (London, 1987)	Peru - -
Elizabeth Bishop	Questions of Travel (New York, 1965)	Brazil [poems]
Robert Bolt -	The Mission - (Harmondsworth, 1986)	Paraguay -
John Buchan -	The Path of the King (London, 1921)	Guiana -
Christopher Burns	Snakewrist (London, 1986)	Brazil -
Angela Carter -	'Master' & -	Brazil -
- - - -	'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest', in Fireworks (London, 1974)	- - -
Bruce Chatwin -	The Viceroy of - Ouidah (London, 1980)	Brazil -
J. M. Coetzee -	Foe (London, 1986)	Brazil, and an island off the Orinoco
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	The Lost World - (London, 1912)	Brazil -
Joseph Conrad -	'Gaspar Ruiz' &	Chile -
- - - -	'The Informer', in A Set of Six (London, 1908)	French Guiana
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'In the Tarumensian Woods' &	Paraguay -
- - - -	'A Jesuit', in - Father Archangel of Scotland (London, 1896)	- - -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'Un Angelito', in The Ipané (London, 1899)	Argentina -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'La Pulpería' &	Argentina -
- - - -	'Cruz Alta', in Thirteen Stories (London, 1900)	Brazil -

A	B	C
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'The Gualichú Tree' &	Argentina -
- - - -	'Los Seguidores', in Success (London, 1902)	- - -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'La Taperá', in Progress (London, 1905)	Argentina -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'Guauguaychú', in His People (London, 1906)	Argentina -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'Paja y Cielo' &	Argentina -
- - - -	'A Silhouette', in Faith (London, 1909)	- - -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'Mirahuano' & -	Colombia -
- - - -	'The Captive', in Hope (London, 1910)	Argentina -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'A Meeting' & -	Paraguay -
- - - -	'San Andrés', in Charity (London, 1912)	Argentina -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'El Rodeo' & -	Argentina -
- - - -	'Los Indios', in A Hatchment (London, 1913)	- - -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'Uno dei Mille',	Brazil -
- - - -	'Los Pingos' & -	Uruguay -
- - - -	'Feast Day in Santa María Mayor', in Brought Forward (London, 1916)	Paraguay -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'Los Llanos del Apure' &	Venezuela -
- - - -	'Anima Vagula', in Redeemed (London, 1927)	Colombia -
R. B. Cunninghame Graham	'Los Niños Toreros',	Venezuela -
- - - -	'Charlie the Gaucho' &	Uruguay -
- - - -	'Facón Grande', in Mirages (London, 1936)	Argentina -
Daniel Defoe -	The Life and - Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (London, 1719)	An island off the Orinoco
'An Estanciero'	Ponce de Leon: The Rise of the Argentine Republic (Buenos Aires, 1878)	Argentina -

A	B	C
Zulfikar Ghose -	The Incredible - Brazilian: The Native (London, 1972)	Brazil -
Zulfikar Ghose -	The Incredible - Brazilian: The Beautiful Empire (London, 1975)	- - -
Zulfikar Ghose -	The Incredible - Brazilian: A Different World (London, 1978)	- - -
Zulfikar Ghose -	A New History of Torments (London, 1982)	- - -
Zulfikar Ghose -	Don Bueno (London, 1983)	- - -
Judith Gleason -	Agôtime: Her Legend (New York, 1970)	Brazil -
Graham Greene -	Travels with My Aunt (London, 1969)	Paraguay -
Graham Greene -	The Honorary Consul (London, 1973)	Argentina -
Graham Greene -	The Captain and the Enemy (London, 1988)	Panama -
Christopher Hampton	Savages (London, 1974)	Brazil [play]
Christopher Hampton	George Steiner's The Portage to San Cristobal of A. H. (London, 1983)	Brazil [play]
G. A. Henty -	Out on the Pampas (London, 1871)	Argentina -
G. A. Henty -	Under Drake's Flag (London, 1883)	The Spanish Main
G. A. Henty -	With Cochrane the Dauntless (London, 1897)	Chile -
G. A. Henty -	The Treasure of the Incas (London, 1903)	Peru - -
W. H. Hudson -	The Purple Land (London, 1885)	Argentina and Uruguay
W. H. Hudson -	'Ralph Herne' - (London, 1888)	Argentina -
W. H. Hudson -	El Ombú and Other Stories (London, 1902)	Argentina -
W. H. Hudson -	Green Mansions - (London, 1904)	Venezuela and Guiana
W. H. Hudson -	A Little Boy Lost (London, 1905)	Argentina -
Alan Jenkins -	Greenheart (London, 1990)	The Amazon [poem]
Judith Kazantzis	A Poem for Guatemala (U.K., 1986)	Guatemala - [poem]

A	B	C
W. H. G. Kingston	On the Banks of the Amazon (London, 1871)	Brazil -
W. H. G. Kingston	Manco the Peruvian Chief (London, 1853)	Peru - -
Richard Llewellyn	Down Where the Moon is Small (London, 1966)	Patagonia -
Robert Lowell -	'Benito Cereno', in The Old Glory (New York, 1965)	Chile [play]
Malcolm Lowry -	'Through the - Panama', in Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place (London, 1961)	Panama -
John Masefield -	'A Sailor's Yarn' & 'The Yarn of Lanky Job', in A Mainsail Haul (London, 1905)	Panama - Chile -
John Masefield -	'Big Jim' & - 'El Dorado', in A Tarpaulin Muster (London, 1907)	Chile - Peru - -
John Masefield -	Captain Margaret (London, 1908)	Panama -
John Masefield -	Lost Endeavour - (London, 1910)	Honduras -
John Masefield -	'Dauber' (London, 1912)	Chile [poem]
John Masefield -	'The Daffodil - Fields' (London, 1913)	Argentina - [poem]
John Masefield -	'Rosas', in A Poem and Two Plays (London, 1918)	Argentina - [poem]
Peter Matthiessen	At Play in the - Fields of the Lord (New York, 1965)	Brazil -
Peter Matthiessen	Far Tortuga (New York, 1975)	Nicaragua -
Herman Melville -	'Benito Cereno' & 'The Encantadas', in The Piazza Tales (New York, 1856)	Chile and Peru The Galapagos Islands
Charlotte Méndez	Condor and - Hummingbird (California, 1986)	Colombia -
George Millar -	Orellana Discovers the Amazon (London, 1954)	Peru and Brazil
Gerald Murnane -	'The Battle of - Acosta Nu', in Landscape with Landscape (Australia, 1987)	Paraguay -

A	B	C
E. Nesbit - -	The House of Arden (London, 1908)	Peru - -
Robert Nye - -	The Voyage of the Destiny (London, 1982)	Guiana - -
Cecile Pineda - -	Face (New York, 1985)	Brazil - -
Christopher Priest	Indoctrinaire - (London, 1970)	Brazil - -
V. S. Pritchett	Dead Man Leading (London, 1937)	Brazil - -
Salman Rushdie -	The Satanic Verses (London, 1988)	Argentina -
Peter Shaffer - -	The Royal Hunt of the Sun (London, 1966)	Peru [play]
Lucius Shepard -	Life During Wartime (London, 1988)	Guatemala and El Salvador
Richard Brinsley Sheridan	Pizarro (London, 1799)	Peru [play]
Robert Southey -	'Madoc in Aztlan' (London, 1805)	Mexico - -
Robert Southey -	'A Tale of Paraguay' (London, 1825)	Paraguay - -
Lisa St Aubin de Téran	Keepers of the House (London, 1982)	Venezuela -
Lisa St Aubin de Téran	The Tiger (London, 1984)	Venezuela and Brazil
Lisa St Aubin de Téran	The High Place - (London, 1985)	Venezuela - [poems]
George Steiner -	The Portage to San Cristobal of A. H. (London, 1983)	Brazil - -
Thomas Stribling	Fombombo (New York, 1923)	Venezuela -
Paul Theroux - -	The Mosquito Coast (London, 1981)	Honduras - -
Lawrence Thornton	Imagining Argentina (London, 1987)	Argentina -
Kurt Vonnegut - -	Galapagos (New York, 1985)	The Galapagos Islands
Ian Watson - -	The Martian Inca (London, 1977)	Bolivia - -
Evelyn Waugh - -	A Handful of Dust (London, 1934)	Brazil - -
A. C. Weisbecker	Cosmic Banditos (New York, 1986)	Colombia -
H. G. Wells - -	'The Country of the Blind',	Colombia -
- - - -	'The Empire of the Ants' &	Brazil - -
- - - -	'The Valley of - Spiders' in The Short Stories (London, 1927)	Peru - -

A	B	C
H. G. Wells -	Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island (London, 1928)	Brazil -
Thornton Wilder	The Bridge of San Luis Rey (London, 1927)	Peru - -
Michael Wilding	The Paraguayan - Experiment: A Documentary Novel (Australia, 1984)	Paraguay -
Henry Lyon Young	Baroque Tales of Chile (London, 1963)	Chile -

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